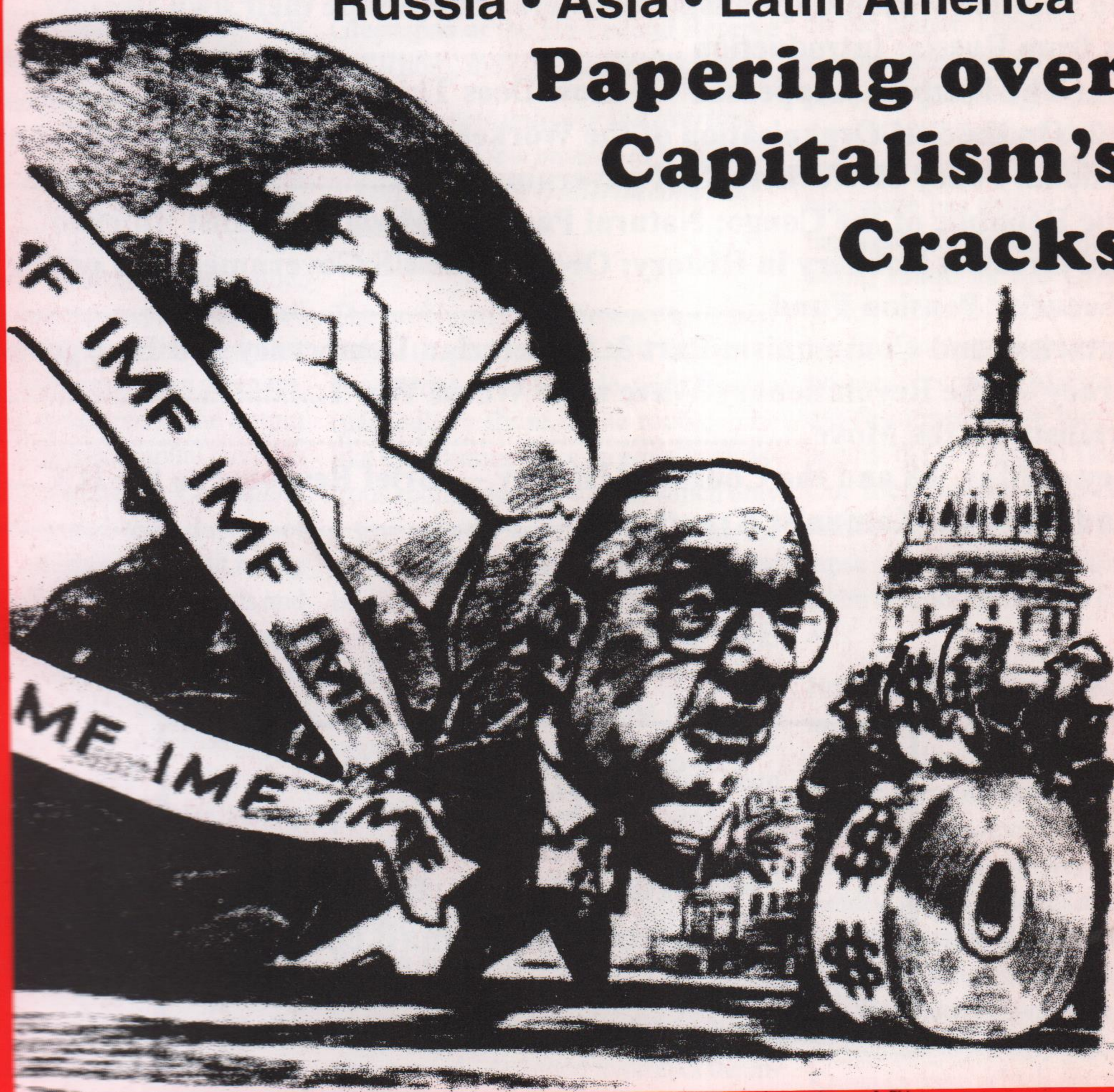


Russia • Asia • Latin America

Papering over Capitalism's Cracks



Multinationals and the Crisis Imperialism in Central Africa

Labour's Lost Jobs

Social Security Robbery in the USA

Two Texts from Russia

Soviets v. Parliaments

The Legacy of May 68

Revolutionary Perspectives

Series 3, No. 12, Autumn 1998

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Capitalism on the High Road to Barbarism

Economic Meltdown

You don't need the tools of Marxist analysis to see that the global capitalist crisis has accelerated and deepened in 1998. Not only are we seeing the crisis of South East Asian economies hitherto held up as models of capitalist expansion but the output of a major economic giant like the Japanese economy has fallen 3.3% (according to its own government). This is near to catastrophe. "Capitalism has to expand or die" (Marx) yet for 30 years the capitalist system has in real terms been stagnant. If growth were measured in the output of commodities and not capital then this would have been apparent. Capitalism has only maintained the illusion of growth by the extension of credit to buy into all kinds of shares, junkbonds and derivatives. The capitalists have been living in an Alice in Wonderland scenario which has been waiting to implode. Now that the South East Asian bubble has burst and the Russian economy has declared itself totally bankrupt, the banks and financial institutions which dominate the global market are looking nervously at other areas like Latin America (where the Brazilian government has raised interest rates to 50% in order to keep international finance capital from leaving the

country). Together all these areas account for one third of world output. Small wonder that Wim Duisenburg of the European Central Bank should have to tell investors "not to panic" whilst Greenspan of the US Federal Reserve and Rubin, the US treasury secretary

... have certainly worked overtime in the past few months to try to keep the whole Western economic edifice together.

The Guardian 12.9.98

The problem is that there are too many holes to plug. The East European economies which trade with Russia (particularly those in the rouble zone like the Ukraine) face an equally disastrous economic fate. China, which only a few months ago was hailed as the world's next big market has also hit the buffers. 22,000 mines are to close there putting 1.5 million miners out of work. They will join the official unemployment figure of 52 millions (although unofficial figures add another 150 millions to that). Greenspan has been pleading (so far unsuccessfully) with the US Congress for months to increase funds for the International Monetary Fund (IMF) so that it can bail out both Russia and Latin America. But in reality the extent of the crisis is beyond the means of the IMF whose policies in any case are only designed to protect the interests of international finance capital. For the working class IMF troubleshooting always brings more hardship — as the case of Russia dealt with in this issue gruesomely shows. The increasing polarisation of wealth and the failure of the Labour Government to do anything but pander to international finance capital are also analysed in this issue.

State Terrorism

On top of economic chaos there has been a desperate increase in imperialist confrontations on the planet. These have been so numerous in the last three months that we have not got enough space to analyse them all. Whilst the fighting in Kosovo has died down a little (since the Serbian state has gained the upper hand) the preparations for the next round are being made as the CIA funds the Kosovo Liberation Army. As we write, the Iranian Army is carrying out troop manoeuvres on the Afghan border in an old-fashioned sabre rattling exercise against the US-backed Taliban regime. Our focus in this issue is on Central Africa where the fallout from the collapse of the old imperialist blocs has taken the most genocidal form this decade.

However there are many other examples to show that there is no "new world order" today. The first was the India-Pakistan nuclear confrontation. Two of the most economically desperate countries in the world were locked in a deadly game of brinkmanship when Pakistan retaliated to the Indian nuclear tests with at least one of its own. The fact that Pakistan was able to do this at all was due to the help it got from North Korea (a state which can manufacture missiles but cannot feed its people) and China. This is a revival of the China-Indian rivalry which led to war in 1962. What is even more disturbing about this crisis was that neither state felt it had anything left to lose. Pakistan already faces economic sanctions from the USA and the BJP government in India were quite happy to blame foreign sanctions for the crisis in India. But this is not the only example which reveals that the US is losing control of many former allies. The mysterious bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania was followed by US retaliation against Osama Bin Laden in both the Sudan and Afghanistan. Bin Laden was THE US-

**Capitalism's
Global Crisis
London Public
Meeting
Conway Hall,
Red Lion Square
(near Holborn Tube)**

2:00pm

Saturday 21st November

backed "freedom fighter" financed by the CIA in the war against the old Soviet Union in Afghanistan. However the US continued support for Israeli attacks on the Palestinians and the arrival of a US force in the Middle East in the Gulf War turned Bin Laden's jihad into one against the US. The fact that the US chooses to respond in kind by bombing a factory in the Sudan without a shred of evidence that it is producing anything other than medicines means that it is in no position to lecture others about "terrorism" or international law (a myth if ever there was one). All it reveals is the naked struggle of imperialism around the globe as the system decays into barbarism.

Only the Working Class can Offer a Real Alternative

The working class response to the scale of this global crisis has been largely muted. Does anyone think that the US ruling class would be fixated on Clinton's semen if it was faced by the prospect of a concerted class response? There is plenty of class anger about but it is largely mixed with despair and, at the moment the responses tend to be isolated and not collective. Where there have been collective responses such as in France in December 1995, and in Denmark and Korea this year, there has been a sophisticated combination of fake union militancy and democratic legalism, largely led by social democratic parties to con the workers into accepting a deal which leaves them no better, or even worse, off. However the important things about these struggles is that, for all their limitations, they give some indication that the working class has not gone away. Despite being written off by all the old Stalinist-now democratic hacks like Eric Hobsbawm (see his new introduction to *The Communist Manifesto*) the working class is still there. And, as long as capitalism exists, it will continually reproduce the conditions for class struggle even if there are long periods of quiet between each wave of struggle. With the Labour Government now openly manipulating statistics (such as hospital waiting lists), freezing (in reality, cutting) public sector wages and

announcing that some unemployment is good for the system in the face of a steady drain of investment from abroad, it may be sooner rather than later before the British working class starts to

fight collectively. This is where we start this issue.

CWO September 1998

The Legacy of Omagh

The pointless savagery of Omagh made us dwell on how terrorist methods are totally alien to the struggle for communism. Communism can only be the result of millions of working class people consciously working for a new society. As we show in our series "Parliamentarism and Communism" (Part Three is in this issue) proletarian democracy rejects the fake democracy of the parliamentary system where a representative is only elected once every five years without the right of recall.

If we look at the historical struggles of the working class we can see that the real terror has been used by the ruling class against us. In the June Days of 1848 20,000 Parisian workers were killed by General Cavaignac's troops. In the Paris Commune another 20,000 killed mainly in cold blood in the Bloody Week of May 1871 (in reprisal the Communards shot the Archbishop of Paris and 80 odd bourgeois leaders). In the Russian Revolution the Bolsheviks at first let their enemies go if they promised not to attack. After these promises were broken, after assassination had killed Bolshevik leaders and after the White Terror had started to crucify captured workers the Bolsheviks introduced a Red Terror. However such terror is part of a class war against an enemy that will not give up its property without a fight. It has nothing at all today with the kind of individual "propaganda of the deed" beloved of the anarchists of the past. What the "Real IRA" (if indeed it was they who planted the Omagh bomb) have achieved is to ensure that Republicans dissenting from the Adams line are now totally discredited. They have given victory to the "forces of democracy" — i.e. to the capitalist state.

While the fact that reactionary nationalism has suffered a reverse is no cause for tears for communists the Omagh bomb has allowed the ruling class here to increase its power to unprecedented levels. Now anyone in the UK can be convicted of belonging to "an illegal organisation" solely on the word of a police officer. The right to silence under interrogation has also gone. Silence now means an admission of guilt. Who needs a police state when they have a 'democracy' like this? This is a splendid gift to the capitalist class who will not confine its use to the few gangsters on either side of the divide in Northern Ireland who did not get a big enough cut in the deal. Whenever it suits the state it will also be used against working class revolutionaries who do not accept capital's "rule of law", even though we might have condemned terrorism a thousand times. But that is also the real face of bourgeois democracy.

Monthly Meetings

The CWO meets at 8.00 p.m. on the first Monday of every month at Cortonwood Miners' Club, Brampton and the third Monday of each month in Sheffield.

For details of venue as well as contact with other sections throughout the country write to the CWO address.

Labour: Sinking the Unsinkable

Although no one doubts there are lies, damned lies and statistics Labour's latest tricks with figures has taken on a new dimension with the birth of New Accounting.

When it announced in July that it would spend £50bn on the economy, including education, health and transport, Labour sparked off an excited debate in the press. The spending bonanza was heralded as proof of New Labour's loyalty to Old Keynesianism. It was claimed to be the most sustained increase in public investment since the 1940's and proof that Labour was rolling back the Thatcher years. The Health Secretary Frank Dobson even claimed it was the biggest health crusade in 50 years.

On the face of it, Brown's promise that £21bn of the £50bn total would go to the NHS seemed to be proof that the freeze on public spending was a thing of the past.

Such is capitalist dreaming.

The era of the cuts is far from over. None of the money promised takes into account inflation. As far as the NHS is concerned, this automatically reduces the £21bn to £10bn. Furthermore the total is to be spread over 3 years, with each years increase being measured against 1998-99 levels rather than the year before. This means that by 2001-2 the real increase in the budget for the NHS will be £1.5bn. On top of this there will have been a spending freeze for 2 years before any of the payments start. In all the health budget will increase by 3.6% a year in real terms, which falls somewhat short of a spending bonanza. It even falls short of Tory spending, since Major increased the NHS budget by 4.1% in his first term. None of this looks very hopeful when you take into account increased demand and the fact that every government for the past 30 years has allowed the infrastructure to run down. In reality spending levels need to grow by 3% just to stand still.

Likewise with education and transport. Labour has promised £19bn for educa-

tion, but by 2001 spending as a proportion of GDP will only have risen to 1996 levels and will still be well below 1979 levels. It will be even less than the amount spent by Thatcher in 1980-81. Again, education will need £6bn to stand still and repairs alone will cost £3bn, such is the state of schools and classrooms. Similarly investment in transport will only be restored to 1992 levels and there are no plans to create cheap reliable public transport systems. In reality, public spending will rise just 2.75% a year until 2002 once inflation is taken into account. So even Brown's promise to eventually double public investment (from £7bn this year to £14bn), an increase of 1.5%, is still less than the Tories were spending in the early '90's.

Economy Sinks

Labour's attempts to get maximum political effect by glossing over reality cannot hide the fact that the global rate of profit is continuing to fall, and the British economy is a firm part of global economic decline. Behind the hype the government admits the economy is on a knife-edge and in August admitted unemployment was set to rise whilst the average rate of earnings growth fell. The working class here, as elsewhere on the planet, will be made to pay for the economic crisis. The so-called spending bonanza, what little there really is of it, will be paid for by cutting workers' wages and benefits. The whole scheme assumes that the pay and conditions of teachers and workers in the NHS will worsen. Although teachers and nurses are leaving their jobs in droves and fewer people are choosing to teach or join the NHS, the government's answer is to introduce pay schemes, which are designed to divide workers against each other. These are either performance-related or are based on creating "superteachers" or "special nurses" — grades which will only bring cash to a minority. Public sector workers

will have to settle for far less than the rate of inflation since pay bodies have been set the unrealistic inflation target of 2.5%. Labour also wants to put pay restraints on workers in the private sector but, unsurprisingly, not for their bosses. Hence the Chief Executive of British Gas got an increase of 74% recently and Yorkshire Water's Chief Executive got a 69% increase.

No Benefits

Labour's new-found generosity doesn't extend to the largest growth sector in the economy; the unemployed. As we wrote in *Revolutionary Perspectives 11* the New Deal is Labour's way of making unemployed workers pay for unemployment. The abandonment of the commitment to full employment was openly stated for the first time by Government advisers and economic gurus. At last it seems that Marx was right all along — capitalism can only survive with a "reserve army of unemployed". Now the debate is about what the level of unemployment has to be to ensure stable capitalist profits! Since unemployment levels will rise, the only question the Labour regime has to answer is how to make benefits harder to claim in order to lower the rates generally. However only 6% of the £100bn welfare costs go to the unemployed. Labour thus has had to widen its attacks to other sectors of the working class. Since 44% goes to the elderly and 25% to the sick and disabled, both have come under renewed pressure, when even the Tories wouldn't dare attack them. Social security spending has been limited to a growth of 1.9% a year and won't keep up with inflation. The government has brought in various plans to make disability benefits harder to claim and its own estimate is that 10,000 people will lose these benefits next year after it changes the qualifying age. At present some 10% of those claiming Incapacity Benefit will have their money reduced and the new Social Security Minister, Alistair Darling has made his first priority at-

tacking the sick. More tough decisions are in the pipeline concerning pensions and the payment of Housing Benefit. In a move that would make Big Brother look proud the Benefit Integrity Project has been established to cut benefits and

in July Blair explained that undeserving welfare would be abolished to pay for "deserving" welfare. In real terms many workers are worse off now than before Labour was elected. So much for Labour's rhetoric about fighting social exclusion.

The reality is that the ruling class needs to keep public spending and wage rates low to make Britain an attractive option for inward investment. It has pushed for a cheap flexible labour market with low taxes on profits since it was elected (despite criticising the Tories for exactly that policy). But even this hasn't been enough to keep the multinationals in Britain. The effect of the economic crisis in Asia is hitting hard and multinational investment has been steadily shrinking. The Siemens semi-conductor plant in the North-East lasted only 15 months, just long enough in fact for the site to be completed, and at a massive cost in state subsidies. Toyota has said it will build its next plant in France and Ford and Vauxhall are also threatening to leave. Likewise many of the Korean firms are reviewing their plans in the wake of the Asian collapse. Two Korean electronics firms have been forced to amalgamate by the South Korean government (which will lead to

job losses in Britain and elsewhere). Fujitsu the Japanese semi-conductor plant at Newton Aycliffe in County Durham (in Blair's constituency) has shut with the loss of 600 jobs. Labour, meanwhile, has been in a desperate frenzy trying to reassure finance capital that inward investment is healthy, (including hurriedly setting up a task force to deal with the departure of Siemens and offer another 100 millions in grants to the North East to offset the unemployment). Ironically the multinationals that have left have been able to do so easily because of the flexible and insecure labour conditions and a lack of pressure to integrate with the local economy. The British economy is increasingly looking less like a sinking ship and more like a tatty submarine. Government debt is currently 40% of the total economic output, which is the equivalent of 15,000 per household. Labour knows that in order to attract investment it must balance the state budget and have low tax demands on the profits of businesses. Its attacks on the working class will therefore become increasingly vicious as the multinationals demand ever-cheaper labour, especially in the wake of an ever-worsening economic crisis.

The Only Alternative

As the crisis takes on new dimensions it is becoming increasingly obvious that the practical interests of those who have work are firmly linked to those who have none. Increasing numbers of employed workers are being forced to accept ever worsening wage levels, many of them not far off benefit levels, whilst benefits are increasingly being reduced to cut social spending in the interests of finance capital. Labour is hoping to encourage the vicious circle whereby those in work are forced to accept lower wages because of the number of unemployed workers willing to work more cheaply whilst those on benefits remain an easy target during the quiet periods of class struggle. The only alternative to Labour and its failing economic system will emerge once the working class, both in work and out, begins its own political self-organisation and takes up the communist programme.

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Globalised Finance Capital versus the International Proletariat — The Class Divide is Growing

Thus it comes about that overwork for some becomes the precondition of unemployment of others and that large-scale industry, which hunts the whole world over for new consumers, confines the consumption of the masses at home to a starvation minimum and thus undermines its own internal market.

The law that always equilibrates the relative surplus population, or industrial reserve army, to the extent and energy of accumulation, this law rivets the labourer to capital more firmly than the wedges of Vulcan did Prometheus to the rock. It involves an accumulation of misery corresponding to the accumulation of capital. Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, bestialisation, moral degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces its own product as capital.

(Marx, Capital)

To expect any other distribution of the products from the capitalist mode of production is like expecting the electrodes of a battery not to decompose water, not to develop oxygen at the positive pole and hydrogen at the negative, so long as they are connected with the battery.

(Engels, Anti-Dühring).

World Capitalism on the Offensive

According to the dominant capitalist perspective, or at least the image which is destined for public consumption, humanity is entering a new world order of a fully globalised economy which will finally do away with antiquated barriers to the circulation of capital and perfect the free market mechanism which alone is able to bring prosperity to every corner of the world. Material reality, however, points to a very different view of the future which capitalism is poised to inflict on humanity. In Britain the spate of job losses in manufacturing, exemplified by the closure of the Siemens plant in North Tyneside, opened only 15 months ago by royalty amidst typical optimistic trumpeting, is expected to impact on the service sector and reinforce insecurity throughout the entire workforce, allowing companies to push for more flexibility and sacrifice from those in work, fearful of job losses. In-

ternationally, despite the manipulation of statistics, further evidence of a jobs and conditions massacre continues to gather. Official statistics admit to 18 million unemployed in the European Union, Jaques Santer states that 20% of youth in the EU are unemployed; the US attempts to cover its real unemployment rate — equivalent to the European level, by a massive growth in part-time work and exclusion from the statistics of those who have given up looking, as well as a huge growth in the prison population¹. The remaining pole of the possible tripolar future which the three main currencies are imposing on humanity is experiencing mass unemployment and crisis to no less an extent. Japanese unemployment is at a post-war high and the Tigers' myth is shattered. The end of July saw the South Korean authorities deploying thousands of riot police around the Hyundai Ulsan plant as students tried to join workers protesting over company plans to axe 3000 jobs.

The Rich and the Poor Grow Further Apart

No, no perfected capitalist utopia benefiting all concerned, where class struggle has been replaced by peaceful co-operation as the global middle-class expands to accommodate all those willing to better themselves, is here, just around the corner or anywhere in the future. The reality is one of massive companies pursuing a relentless profit drive at the cost of the proletariat's most basic needs. The rate of growth of the largest multinational companies matches the misery faced by more and more workers. Table 1 illustrates the accelerated rate of economic concentration².

Not surprisingly, this process of concentration of the means of production, alongside the centralisation of finance capital, means that the class divide is deepening. In Britain, the wealthiest 1000 individuals are worth a combined £112 billion. The scandal of huge company director pay increases is well-

known³. According to *Le Monde Diplomatique* (May 1997) "In the United States, 1% of the population possesses 39% of the country's wealth. And on a world scale the patrimony of the richest 358 people (dollar billionaires) is greater than the annual income of 45% of the poorest inhabitants, that is 2.6 billion people." The UN's annual *Human Development Report* states that "gross inequalities between rich and poor countries are worsening, with 20% of the global population accounting for 86% of consumption"⁴.

No Capitalist Solution to the Gulf Between Classes

The capitalist offensive has to be halted, for the price of the continued existence of a mode of production which can only extend its lifespan by a perverse degradation of humanity, through the progressive erosion of the material conditions of life of the mass of humanity with nothing to sell but labour-power, is a catastrophic slide into ever more barbaric social relations with only the colossal destructive power of a global war being able to restore the conditions for another accumulation phase of capital. This is because the driving force behind the relentless process of capital concen-

tration, incremented exploitation of the workforce, the destruction of welfare provision and the existence of a permanent unemployed and underemployed mass is that law described by Marx in the third book of *Capital* — the tendency for the average rate of profit to fall. This decline in profitability due to competition between rival capitals forcing the use of ever-more sophisticated technology and productive apparatus which increases the productivity of labour and cuts the price of producing commodities, leads to an increasing fraction of capital devoted to the non-profitable purchase of materials of production other than the only source of surplus value, and profits, — that obtained by exploiting flesh and blood workers. It is the desperate need to maintain sufficient levels of profitability which ensure that the capitalist parasite will return to deplete the material life-force of its proletarian host on an ever-worsening scale. It is this fact which allows us to declare all the multifaceted manifestations of reformism, all solutions outside of the abolition of capitalism, with its class distinctions, wage labour, commodity production for profit regardless of need, are not simply inadequate to ensure the end of modern slavery. In their opposition to revolutionary socialism, the passing of power from the bourgeoisie to the pro-

letariat to construct the classless society on a world scale, they actively assist in the preservation of the capitalist regime, which as we have seen, is constrained to suck the very life out of the proletariat to further the interests of capital accumulation. Today the Holy Grail of peaceful relations between classes for the mutual benefit of all concerned is more elusive than ever. Its ardent seekers, ranging from Stalinists to Social Democrats, Trade Unionists and this or that reformer of individual aspects of capitalist abuse all claim to stand for the improvement of proletarian conditions whilst preserving the generator of all the maladies afflicting the class — the capitalist mode of production. Here in Britain the Labour Party set up a new version of the failed over and over again government training scheme, spend some money on health and education whilst shutting schools and freezing public sector pay and claim to be friends to everyone as the relentless slide into poverty, the inability to expand the real economy and the growth of the part-time/precarious sector, masking the massacre of better quality employment. continue to advance. The Labour Party's fellow travellers, all the other proponents of one or another aspect of capitalism, usually in its state-capitalist guise, the numerous grouplets of radical sounding "socialists" and "Trotskyists" who prop up the moribund Labour Party/Trade Union non-revolutionary perspective are equally incapable of guiding the working class whose emancipation is synonymous with the rupturing of all capitalist institutions and the establishment of a new form of State under the authority of Workers' councils. *Socialist Worker* may crow about the United Auto Workers' recent strike "success" against giant industrial corporation, General Motors, but admits the company still wants to wipe out 50 000 more jobs, the union agreed to a no-strike deal at the Delphi-East plant until the year 2000 as well as productivity increases at the Flint stamping plant. The inability to recognise the Trade Union perspective of bargaining within capitalism, preventing the anti-capitalist struggle, as obsolete as far as defence of the proletariat is concerned, means such a group is unable to break with

World Top Ten Listed Companies

Company	Market value £bn 1998	Company	Market value £bn 1993
General Electric	175	A&T Corp	58
Microsoft	158	General Electric	57
Coca-Cola	121	Exxon	54
Exxon	101	Wal-Mart Stores	40
Royal Dutch Shell	100	Coca-Cola	39
Merck	92	Royal Dutch Shell	35
Intel	90	Phillip Morris	28
Wal-Mart Stores	86	British Telecom	27
Pfizer	83	General Motors	23
Nippon Tel & Tel	80	GTE	23

Table 1

the apparatus of conflict regulation within capitalism, the mechanism which seeks to prevent the escalation of class conflict to revolutionary proportions.

either end of an ever more polarised class society.

Notes

Against Inequality — the Revolutionary Perspective

Those who recognise that the further existence of capitalism is dependent on the increase in misery of the proletariat, reject as instruments of the ruling class all political entities not standing on the platform of the dictatorship of the proletariat, are revolutionaries. Although the answer to the question of how long capitalism will remain lies in the hands of the entire working class, the bearer of the already possible superior communist mode of production, revolutionaries' efforts as the advanced fraction of that class to construct the future World Communist Party and spread our perspectives within the class can hasten the process by which isolated sparks of class struggle escape the stultifying clutches of the Trade Unions and left-capitalist parties and extend to other sectors of the labour force to become the mass force which communists will seek to transform into the gravedigger of the capitalist mode of production. Outside of this perspective for the abolition of capitalism, there is no alternative to the concentration of wealth and misery at

1. 'To begin with, the prison system makes a direct contribution to regulating the lower segments of the labour market — and does so in infinitely more coercive fashion than any social charge or administrative rule. Its effect here is artificially to compress unemployment levels both by forcibly abstracting millions of males from the job-seeking population, and also by boosting employment in the prison goods and service sector. It is, for example, estimated that during the 1990's US prisons brought down US unemployment figures by two percentage points. According to Bruce Western and Katherine Beckett, taking into account the differences in levels of imprisonment in the two continents, and contrary to the idea commonly accepted and actively disseminated by the advocates of neoliberalism, for 18 of the past 20 years US unemployment rates have been higher than those of the European Union ("Unemployment under wraps", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August '98).

2. Source — *The Times*, August 12th 1998

3. Fat cat multi-millionaire Lord Hanson objects that business leaders are "plagued by the cartoons of well-upholstered figures quaffing champagne and smoking cigars in expensive restaurants, while children beg for change outside in the cold. These images have their origins in the communist propaganda of the twen-

ties. Today it still has the power to damage. The capitalist, the top business leader, should be lauded and rewarded." Quoted in *Socialist Worker*, 8th August, 1998.

4. Quoted in *The Guardian* p18, 9th September 1998. The same article states that "The three richest people on the planet — Microsoft's Bill Gates, the Walton family of Wal-Mart stores and legendary investor Warren Buffet — have assets that exceed the combined GDP of the 48 least developed countries."

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Crisis in Russia: No Solution Within Capitalism: Workers Must Shape Their Own Destiny

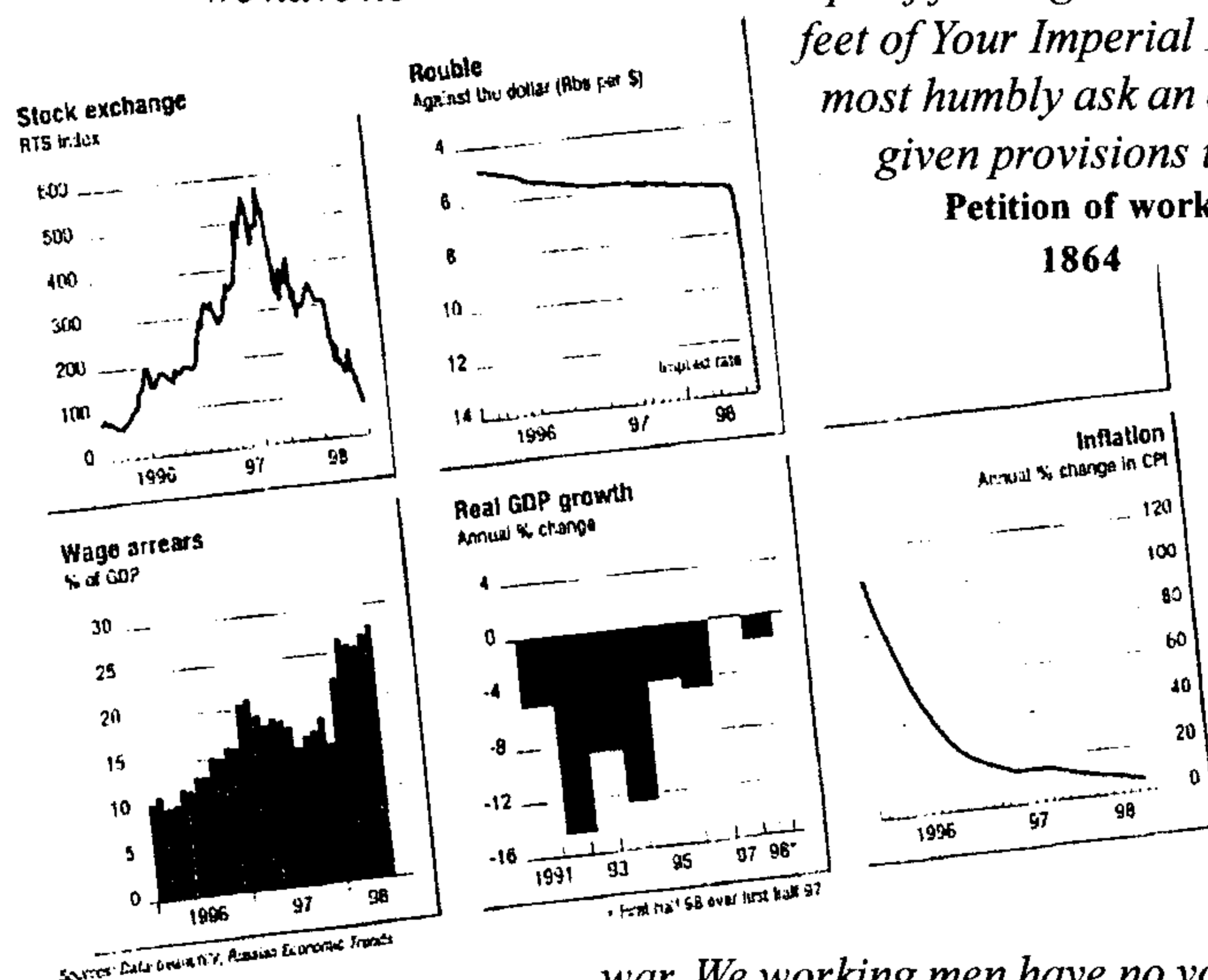
Most august monarch! Most merciful sovereign!

We, the undersigned skilled craftsmen (from the craftsman rank) of the Zlatoust Mining Plant, entered the service of your Imperial Majesty... In the course of our retirement, we have completely exhausted our property just to buy food (because our pension is inadequate), and we now find ourselves in the most destitute condition ... at present we have no

hope of feeding ourselves. For this reason, we fall to the most holy feet of Your Imperial Majesty, as to the defender of the poor, and most humbly ask an order to whomever appropriate that we be given provisions until the end of our lives.

Petition of workers from Ufa province to Tsar Alexander II, 9th April

1864



Sire — We, working men and inhabitants of St Petersburg, our wives and our children and our helpless old parents, come to You, Sire, to seek for truth, justice and protection. We have been made beggars, we are oppressed; we are near to death ... the moment has come for us when death would be better than the prolongation of our intolerable sufferings ... Officials have brought the country to complete ruin and involved it in a shameful

war. We working men have no voice in the way the enormous amounts raised

from us in taxes are spent...

We are seeking here our last solution. Do not refuse to help Your people.

From the workers' petition organised in 1905 by Father Gapon, the Orthodox priest. The Tsar responded by using Cossack troops to fire on the peaceful demonstration. Hundreds died and many more were wounded on the day that has gone down in history as Bloody Sunday. Within a week the 1905 Revolution had begun.

Mr President!

The crisis in our country continues to deepen. The economic course that you are carrying out has led to the collapse of the economy and impoverishment of the Russian citizens.

Against the background of an unprecedented in the world decline in living standards, non-payment of wages and mass sackings, repeated replacements of members of the Governments [which are] witness to the inability of the authorities headed by you to lead the country out of the crisis and to secure Constitutional rights of the citizens for work and normal life. ...

Every day of your activities brings new disasters, intensifies distrust towards you, deepens contradictions between the people and the public authorities, and brings about mass protest actions of the workers.

Boris Nikolayevich! In the hope that you are not indifferent to the destiny of Russia, we are calling upon you to voluntarily resign.

Appeal of the General Council of the Russian Federation of Free Trade Unions, August 27th 1998

As we write the capitalist press and television in the West are reporting the end of "political deadlock" in Russia with the Duma's acceptance of Primakov as Prime Minister. The implication is that further 'market turmoil' as a knock-on effect of the economic crisis in Russia can be avoided, albeit with the distasteful return of 'Communists' into key govern-

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ment posts such as finance. But behind the media's attempt to portray Yeltsin's plight as something akin to Bill Clinton's and the struggle with the Duma as a Russian version of 'Today in Parliament' there is a never-ending economic crisis whose social consequences have reached catastrophic proportions.

A Capitalist Crisis of Catastrophic Proportions

The extent of this crisis is reflected in demographic figures: a declining birth rate [from 2.2 million in 1989 to 1.4 million in 1996]

with 50% of new-born babies with health defects and a rising death rate [from 1.6 million in 1989 to 2.2 million in 1995]; declining life expectancy [now an average of 58 for adult males]. It is reflected in the spread of infectious diseases, notably antibiotic resistant tuberculosis, as well as in the strictly economic sphere where unemployed and unpaid workers are left to their own devices, leading to a barter economy and dependence on vegetable plots. It is evident in growing food shortages and widespread hunger.¹

For dyed-in-the-wool Trotskyists and Stalinists this crisis is the product of the 're-introduction of capitalism'. For the majority of financial commentators here it is the consequence of not going far enough with 'market reforms'. Neither of these is true.

The fact is that the workers' revolution which began in economically backward Russia in October 1917 was ground down by civil war and famine before being finally isolated and left without hope of international support after the failure of European workers' revolution. The result was a terrible defeat which was all the more powerful and long-lasting because it took the shape of the lie that there was 'socialism in one country' — the USSR — when in reality commodity production, wage labour and massive exploitation of labour power still existed, while the soviets had become empty shells and had lost all resemblance to democratic organs of workers' self-government. Above all, when the Bolshevik Party — the Party which had won the hearts of the working class because it stood for their interests above all else — became synonymous with the state machine, then it was easy for the ruling class in East and West to get workers to believe that labour camps, food shortages, party dictatorship, 'totalitarianism' and just about anything brutal and nasty was 'communism'. But the massive state behemoth that Stalinism created had nothing in common with communism. On the contrary, it was a machine devoted to extracting as much surplus value as possible from the working class in order to allow Russia to compete with the rest of the capitalist world and regain and later maintain its position as a world imperialist power. The fact that

virtually the whole of industry and agriculture were nationalised with commodities produced according to a central state plan does not mean that the state was therefore 'socialist', no more than the nationalised industries in Britain meant that the state was semi-socialist.

However the highly centralised nature of Russian state capitalism, where Party bosses with entrenched spheres of interest constituted the exploiting class, meant a highly inflexible economy which was made even more cumbersome by the channelling of the lion's share of surplus value to military production. The latter was a reflection of Russia's

relative weakness as a 'super' imperialist power. There is no doubt that the burden of keeping up with the arms race exacerbated the problem of a dearth of funds for investment in new capital equipment, particularly in Department II (consumer goods) Russian capitalism faced the same problem as the West: declining growth as a result of the fall in the average rate of profit. (Whether or not the Marxicologists of the CPSU cared to recognise it, the law of value still operated in the Soviet Union.)

The economic stagnation and political inertia of the Brezhnev years ensured that the crisis would be all the more severe when it finally exploded. By the



The world ruling class sees that the IMF can't save Russia. And if it can't save Russia...

time Gorbachev appeared on the scene the bulk of Russian industry outside of military production was desperate for new technology and renewed capital investment. Hence perestroika and the political turn to Western Europe ("our common European home") and all the political concessions which quickly led to the disintegration of the Eastern imperialist bloc and eventually to the collapse of the USSR itself. All that the overseers of Russian capital could do was make a virtue of necessity and 'open up' to foreign capital. Yet, as we said at the time, there would be no regeneration of the Russian economy on the basis of Western investment: if for no other reason than the West itself does not have the massive amount of surplus value that restructuring and equipping new industries would require.

No Reconstruction By International Capital

As the Yeltsin Government has learned to its cost, 1998 is not 1948. The whole world economy has been in crisis for more than twenty-five years and neither the US nor its 'allies' have the wherewithal to provide a modern version of the Marshall Plan for the ex-USSR. In fact the net effect of Russia's opening up to the world market has been a massive flight of capital abroad — to the tune of \$63bn between 1992 and 1995.² While this has helped build the personal fortunes of a band of *nouveaux super-riches* it has not been offset by 'inward investment' on anything like the same scale. According to the World Bank, restructuring of Russian industry requires between \$25-30bn to convert military industry and \$50-60bn for renewing civilian industry. "Total US investment in Russia in 1997 was \$7bn."³ Neither have international loans been abundant. Despite the outcry over Russia's unilateral 'postponement' of \$40bn of short-term debt in August most of Russia's \$123.5bn foreign debt is left over from the days of the USSR.⁴ The bulk of post-Soviet debt — about \$18.7bn — is owed to the IMF or the World Bank. Much of this has been siphoned off into foreign bank accounts but in any case it is a drop in the ocean when it comes to the revival of Russian capitalism. (For instance the state owes about \$11bn in unpaid wages.) This

doesn't stop the IMF imposing strict monetarist conditions on its loans, as it does all over the world: conditions which deliberately and directly worsen the plight of the working class under the banner of reducing government spending. The latest stipulations by the IMF and the World Bank for Russia are:

- * the introduction of VAT;
- * reduction of employers' social insurance contributions;
- * increase in contributions from workers' wages;
- * more workers at lower end of the pay-scale to pay income tax;
- * end of subsidies on rents and housing by 2002 — i.e. rent increases or introduction of rent charges on hitherto 'free' company housing;
- * pension cuts;



Workers in Vladivostok. Their poster reads: "Only slaves work for free. We are not slaves!"

In the context of the situation in Russia you would think trying to implement this monetarist package is akin to lunacy. Yet, according to the report quoted earlier, plans to end housing subsidies are already underway.

At the same time, procedures are being introduced to facilitate eviction. In St Petersburg ... the State Property Committee began in early 1998 to move tenants more than six months in arrears with their rent payments and service bills out of their apartments and in to less desirable accommodation, such as hostels and dormitories. One fifth of the city's residents or

almost a million people, are behind in their payments.

However, Duma deputies balked at the prospect of passing bills to implement the rest of this package. Most of them are from the provinces where the crisis is at its worst and where local governors are struggling to contain working class protests. This was why they absolutely refused to accept Chernomyrdin as Prime Minister. He is too closely associated with the financial and business tycoons who backed Yeltsin in the first place.

The appointment of Primakov represents the attempt by the Russian ruling class to ride two horses at once: someone the West knows who may help to reassure the 'markets' and squeeze out some sort of financial deal and someone from the Soviet past whom workers are more likely to believe will bring some economic security. Within hours of his appointment he has been quoted as saying that Russia's economic re-

forms will continue and that international debts will be honoured [for foreign consumption] and that "The state must interfere in and regulate many processes in the economy".⁵

At the moment placating international financial institutions is less important than preventing social unrest and

Primakov, with Yuri Maslyukov former chairman of Gosplan and Victor Gerashchenko one-time chairman of Gosbank, in tow have the support of all factions from the populist general Lebed to Zyuganov's Communist Party.⁶ Flying in the face of monetarist orthodoxy this new government is set to resort to the printing press and unleash the genie of inflation as it tries to subdue 'social unrest' and pay back wages with a rapidly devaluing currency. Like modern Father Gapon the trade unions are there to contain the protests, limit them to legal bounds and pleas for social justice from a system which is bankrupt in more ways than one and which knows no boundaries to

its attacks on the working class.⁷ If the crisis of capitalism is more acute in Russia it is showing us just what exactly it has to offer so long as it is allowed to continue on its downward course. It is clearer than ever that there is no room in this system for social justice and in Russia barbarism already reigns. It is time for workers get off their knees, to resist the call for yet more sacrifices for the sake of "the destiny of Russia" and turn to fighting for their own interests with their best weapons of solidarity and self-organisation. The best weapon of all will be the weapon of revolutionary class consciousness which has been buried by half a century of Stalinist nationalism disguised as "really existing socialism". It is time for those would-be revolutionary minorities in Russia who have not been

taken in by this lie to hasten the progress towards the restitution of the really communist programme of international revolution.

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Notes

¹ See *The Crisis in Russia: From Bad to Worse* in the previous issue.

² According to a Russian source quoted in a paper by Stephen Shenfield for the social democratic 'Labour Information and Research Centre' entitled *On the Threshold of Disaster: the Socio-Economic Situation in Russia*.

³ Loc.cit.

⁴ \$91.4bn, i.e. almost 75%, according to the same source.

⁵ Financial Times 12.9.98

⁶ In case anyone should think otherwise Zyuganov has made it clear that he stands on the side of Russian capital. After a meeting with "Western parliamentarians" early in September he said, "I must admit, I persuaded them to tell their leaders in the West that a left-centre government would do everything to restore normal relations and trust in our market." Reuters report on *Russia Today* web site, 9.9.98.

⁷ In a pathetic appeal to "all members of trade unions and working people of Russia" in August the unions maintained that the "extremely grave character" of the situation meant that "it is necessary for unions to use all legal means of struggle to ensure an immediate change in the course of reforms in the interest of the people of Russia, a just solution of social and economic problems, which, sharper than ever before, are now facing the working people of the entire country. 27.8.98

Two Texts From Russia

Articles from *Proletarian Tribune*

Reprinted on the following pages are translations of two articles from previous issues of **Proletarian Tribune** (PT) — a Russian-based "journal of theory". Both articles show sparks of hope for those seeking proletarian political theory and practice. The first reveals the role of the Trade Unions in Russia, as elsewhere, as agents of capitalist order. It also shows the existence of elements who can see through their facade as workers' defenders. The second is a declaration from a group based in Southern Russia who appeal for an "International Party of Workers' Self-Government". Following an intervention at a conference in Moscow late in 1997 by the CWO on behalf of the IBRP we know that there is an extensive ferment amongst a whole range of tendencies and individuals seeking the meaning of Marxist politics and theoretical clarity. One aspect of that ferment is reflected in a separate article from PT where the editors comment that "In one organisation there are people of different, almost opposing viewpoints, at the same time people who are actually like-minded are

squabbling over ludicrous differences". The difficulties confronting those elements should not be understated. The effect of more than sixty years of systematic misrepresentation of Marxism by an all-powerful state machine bequeathed a mass of confusion which has to be overcome. The economic crisis forces many proletarians into a day-to-day process of ducking and diving in the "black market" and "jobs on the side simply to keep themselves alive. The collapse of the currency and the lack or weakness of means of communication multiplies many times the difficulty of making contact and maintaining dialogue between those seeking clarification. It is with that in mind that we publish the second article. Clearly we do not share the belief of the writers in the need for "A broad bloc, uniting all the anti-bourgeois, anti-imperialistic forces". Neither do we believe in a project which includes scientific Marxists and "supporters of universal progressive democracy". Nevertheless there are many formulations in the appeal which contain the essential seeds necessary to develop a truly communist consciousness. The inclusion in the appeal for a world communist revolution, the nature

of communist society as being without money or commodity production, the necessity for an International Party and the centrality of workers' assemblies and councils all suggest critical understandings in contradiction to the essentially social democratic formulations referred to earlier. The recent series of economic and political crises which have shaken the Russian state shows two points very clearly. Firstly, it is clear that no layer of the Russian ruling class have any strategy capable of defending capitalism in Russia from the worst effects of the imperialist melt-down. Secondly, it is increasingly urgent that those engaged in the struggle for clarification must be given every encouragement to maintain and redouble those efforts as they seek to identify an independent working-class voice against tweedledum Yeltsin and tweedle-dee Zyuganov. The CWO has already entered into dialogue with a number of elements in Russia [see the Appeal in our last issue] in the interests of developing a tendency in the traditions of internationalist communism. We will keep readers informed as that dialogue develops.

The Kuzbass “Appeased” — How Does This Happen ?

The 11th of July 1997 was expected to be a special day. A general strike had been called for the mining area of Kuzbass, the most militant region of Russia. Apparently the patience of people who had not received their wages for months had snapped. A “Committee for the Salvation of the Kuzbass” was established as a leadership. In fact this Committee served its purpose but definitely not as an organ of people’s struggle or of self-government. It was infiltrated by representatives of bureaucratic trade unions, and political parties representing executive and legislative power including “oppositionists”. The boss of the FNPR [Federation of Independent Free Trade Unions of Russia] was designated as the supreme “saviour” - the president of the Committee. As had happened during the spring, the official trade unions had been compelled to declare protest actions, fearing that a social explosion like the Albanian scenario would otherwise take place. The spectre of rebellion roamed the Kuzbass, where the people were going hungry and the mines were closing down. Leaders always experience the greatest terror in front of rank-and-file workers. On this occasion the protest organisers were forced to put forward extremely radical slogans: the redemption of payment arrears, reduction of rail tariffs, the resignation of Yeltsin and his government of cannibal-“reformers”. At this point the authorities made a very cunning manoeuvre. The old governor of the Kemerov region, the “Yeltsinite” democrat Kisyluk, was pensioned off. The prominent “oppositionist” Tuleyev, close to the National-Stalinist “communists”, was designated in his place. This careerist and opportunist made great

use of his popularity in the Kuzbass, having the reputation as a “defender of peoples’ interests”. Unfortunately, love for authority and the illusion of the ‘beneficent Tsar’ are still alive amongst a significant portion of our fellow-citizens. The Moscow rulers counted on this.

Trades unionists and other “peoples’ leaders” spluttered with delight. The bosses of the FNPR and the “Independent (from whom?) Union of Miners” welcomed the change from bad to equally bad as though it was, if not exactly heaven on earth, at least a proof of the benefits of reform.

The real meaning of the Kemerov changeover was not slow to come to light. On coming to power, the first thing that the new regional governor did was to declare the validity and justice of the protests. The second was immediately to threaten that any attempts to stop work would be met by force. In other words, meetings and marches with ritual and harmless curses were fine, but striking was simply a no-no! He would simply not allow it — It was in the workers own interests — if no-one worked how would anyone eat? Bleary waves of demagoguery, of vague promises and of straightforward intimidation covered the Kuzbass ...

The General Strike called for 11th July did not take place. It was reduced to meetings and fiery speeches. Steam has again been let off, and everything has died down until the next time when it will be impossible to be patient, when trade unions, parties and other organs created for the deception of the masses will again begin to feign seething activity and the authorities answer it with another reshuffle of a minister or a governor. Of course, no back-wages are being paid and no-one intends to do so. The biggest mines and enterprises con-

tinue to be closed down, condemning whole towns and cities to abject poverty.

No-one knows when the hungry working people of today’s Russia will rise. However, there is one good thing about the way that the national-Stalinist “opposition” taxis into the militant areas. It shows everyone that all those so-called “communist” parties of the Zyuganovs, Anpilovs and Tyulkins in fact intend to change nothing but the faces of those giving the orders and exercising power. In Russia today there is not — and will not be — a political opposition, the real struggle is not between Yeltsin and the “Peoples-Patriotic Union” [the Red-Brown Alliance of Stalinists and right-wing nationalists - trans.] but between eight or nine industrial-financial concerns and cliques. This is a struggle for power over us

However much we hate Yeltsin, Chernomyrdin, Chubais, Nemtsov, Gaidar and his team, we say frankly: neither elections nor a shift of power will save us. The only solution is class conflict and social revolution !

On the Self-Organisation of the Workers' Movement: Proposals for an International Policy of Workers' Self-government

We declare: the USSR developed in the hands of bureaucratic state control. This promoted the conception of a class of employers in the form of private factory owners, businessmen, bankers and stock jobbers. With the development of world capitalism the contradictions of productive forces and relations of production have deepened. Productive relations no longer corresponded to the level of development of world productive forces and have been transformed into their shackles. The labour of today's workers has become mechanised and automated. The number of unemployed workers has is increasing, the exploitation of workers occupied in production has intensified. A broad bloc, uniting all the anti-bourgeois, anti-imperialist forces, is necessary for the rout of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie.

A party of a new type, inclusive of both supporters of scientific Marxism and supporters of universal progressive democracy, may serve as the best form of unification. The programmed goals of the party are freedom of all from all kinds of exploitation and from oppression of man by man.

The construction of a society in which the basic principles are the free development of each individual as a condition of the free development of all; from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs; the control over production processes

and things rather than control over people.

The basis for the realization of the goals is the installation of world communist revolution by the contemporary working class and the creation of a new social system — a State of Workers' Democratic Self-government. Production communes and communities are part of the new state. Workers' democratic control of production and of the state obliterates the class division of labour and consolidates a new form of connectivity of labour. All are drawn into the production of output, and work simultaneously as both workers and administrators, taking part in the distribution of wealth.

Commodity-money relations are replaced by money-free relations of production involving labour certificates or receipts. For the realization of the goals the International Party of Workers' Self-government (IPWS) arms the working class ideologically, politically, economically, judicially and organisationally.

It organises the structure of worker' self-government, workers' press, workers' television, radio, strike committees, councils of workers' self-government, committees of workers' self-defence.

Control of production and of the state is realized through workers' assemblies and councils of public workers' self-government. Workers' deputies to the organs of power carry out their duties on an unpaid basis. Elections are open according to the following scheme :—

The Workers' assembly of a factory section sets up a council of workers' self-government from its workers.

From the members of the council of workers' self-government of the section they select a worker for the job of deputy of the council of workers' self-government (CWS) of the factory, from the deputies of the factory CWS a worker is elected to the district CWS, from the deputies of the district CWS they elect a worker as a deputy to the regional CWS, from there they elect a worker to the CWS of the Republic. In this way rank-and-file workers will directly control the top and medium-level power in the country.

We call on the workers of the world : organize yourselves into an International Party of Workers' Self-government.

The Southern Russian International Council

of Supporters of Workers' Self-government

May 1997

Democratic Republic of Congo: Natural Paradise Made Capitalist Inferno

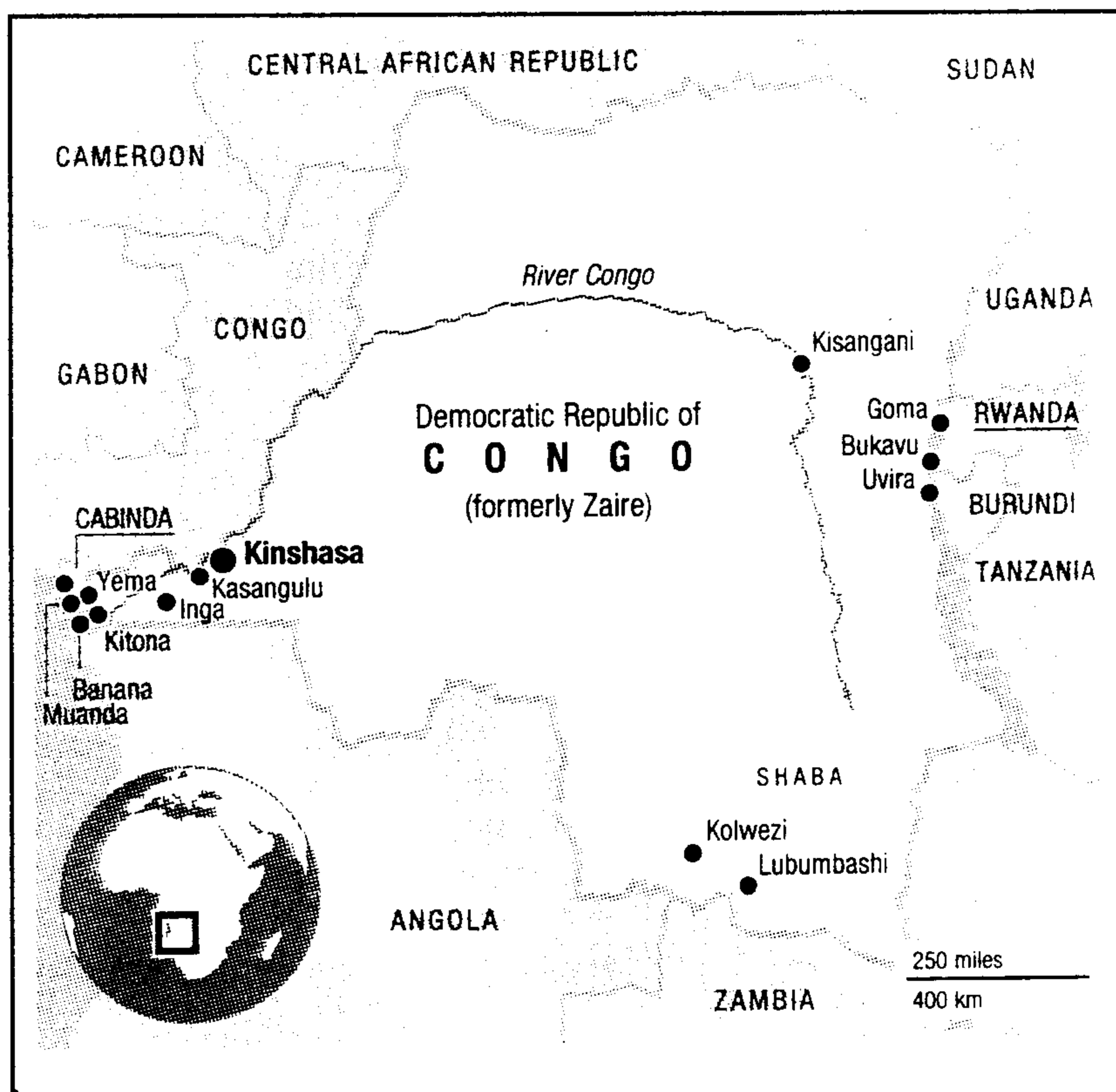
It is only a year since Laurent Kabila was swept to power at the head of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of the Congo (AFDL); only a year since the corrupt and discredited Mobutu regime was defeated and we were promised a glorious new future for the renamed "Democratic Republic of the Congo" and for Central Africa. Now civil war rages once more, forces from five neighbouring states have intervened in the conflict and destruction, death and suffering have engulfed the country from East to West. Uganda and Rwanda, the very forces which brought the AFDL and Kabila to power, are seeking to overthrow him and the US which is the puppet master of Uganda and Rwanda is prepared to let the fighting run its course. At the time of writing a peace conference

at Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe has collapsed and it appears likely that the war will continue probably leading to a stalemate with the rebels backed by Uganda and Rwanda occupying the Kivu provinces, which form the East of the country and border on Uganda and Rwanda, and Angola with the help of Zimbabwe and Namibia occupying the western Atlantic area and the southern area bordering on Angola. Thus the country, itself an artificial creation of

imperialism in the last century, will be divided. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a country rich in minerals, agricultural and other resources, yet today it is a country of general poverty, destruction, refugees and death. The reason for its present desperate state has little to do with the country

and world war, been an important theatre for US imperialism, firstly because of its rich mineral resources and secondly because of its strategic position. The relative importance of these two factors has changed as the imperialist conflicts in the area have changed and US policy has been adjusted accordingly.

The country contains massive deposits of diamonds, copper, cobalt together with gold, uranium, zinc, manganese, tin, iron as well as coal and oil, all of which US capital would dearly like to get its hands on. Its position in central Africa gives it borders with Congo, the Central African Republic, Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, Zambia and Angola. Across these borders



itself or its peoples, instead the reason is to be found in the operation of global imperialism. The country forms a vital part of central Africa which is being reshaped to suit the needs of US capitalism.

Interests of US Imperialism

The Democratic Republic of Congo, or Zaire as it was previously called, has, since the sec-

guerrilla wars and destabilisation campaigns have been launched against states hostile to US interests.

After World War Two the primary aim of US imperialism was to eject the European imperialist powers from Africa and to make the area safe for US capital. As the European powers such as Britain, France and, in the case of Zaire, Belgium, withdrew, the US's pre-occupation changed to one of ensuring that Russian imperialism did not re-

place European imperialism in the ex-colonies. In the Congo, which received independence from Belgium in 1960, the process of excluding Russian influence led to a bloody civil war in which the US intervened energetically. The sordid truth about the US's activities which, according to South African state security documents recently exposed, included engineering the death of the UN secretary general Hammerskjold, has yet to be revealed in full. However, civil war raged across the country for approximately 5 years until the pro-Russian faction was crushed by US and Belgium troops in 1964, and the Katangese leader Tshombe, who was the representative of the western mining interests, was installed in power. Tshombe was himself overthrown the following year by the army under Mobutu who represented another pro-US faction. The settlement achieved was acceptable to US imperialism which was happy to let their junior partners France and Belgium to dominate the regimes of Congo (now renamed Zaire), Rwanda and Burundi and to intervene militarily from time to time.

With the increase in Russian influence in southern Africa, particularly after the collapse of Portuguese colonial power in 1974, the strategic use of Zaire to the US became paramount. It was from here that aid was channelled to various movements which opposed Russian influence, most notably Unita in Angola, but also movements in Mozambique and Zimbabwe. The mid '70's also saw a massive programme of nationalisation of the economy by the Mobutu regime which, in response to the generally higher raw material prices, tried to appropriate more of the profits generated for itself. This was not seriously opposed by the US because of the strategic value of the country. This meant, however, a collapse of foreign investment and a decline in the economy which was to become serious with the fall in the prices of raw materials in the '80's.

With the collapse of Russian imperialism at the start of the '90's the various national liberation movements in Southern Africa became US clients, and the counter movements such as Unita in Angola or Renamo in Mozambique had outlived their usefulness to the US and

had to be destroyed. The Mobutu regime by this time had been saved on more than one occasion by French and Belgian troops. Once the Cold War over it was no longer of any use to the US. On the contrary it supported the pro-French regimes in Rwanda and Burundi and the opposition to the US major ally in the area Museveni of Uganda. The US wanted to undermine French influence in Central Africa. Suddenly the inefficiency and corruption of the regime became the dominant concerns of the US, since these were preventing US capital from exploiting the minerals and oil. The Mobutu regime had to go. What the US needed was stability and a new regime which would begin privatisation of the mining and parts of the infra structure and would open the country to international capital. At this point the influence of the US's junior imperialist partner France stood in the way. The process by which the US supplanted French influence Rwanda and Zaire has been described elsewhere see "The Great Power Struggle in Central Africa" in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 6. However, Kabila who emerged at the head of the AFDL and who was himself an ex-Maoist (i.e. a state capitalist), proved incapable of bringing either stability or opening the country to US capital.

When President Clinton visited Africa in April he announced that, "From Capetown to Kampala, from Dar es Salaam to Dakar democracy is gaining strength, business is growing and peace is making progress." By this he meant that US imperialism is consolidating its grip and moulding the continent to the needs of US capital. The reckless response of the US to the bombing of its embassies in Kenya and Tanzania shows that it is serious about its ambitions for Africa. The present military incursions into the Democratic Republic of the Congo must to some degree have been sanctioned by the US and are a part of the glorious "progress of peace" that President Clinton praised so highly in April.

Mini-Imperialist Ambitions

Uganda, Rwanda and Angola all have guerrilla movements operating against them from the

Democratic Republic of Congo's territory. They therefore have their own mini-imperialist reasons for intervening. Reasons which relate to the network of alliances in the region but which at present fit in with the wider interests of the US.

Uganda, which is the US's main ally in the region is suffering a guerrilla war from a group called the Alliance of Democratic Forces (ADF) which is dominated by Muslim fundamentalists, sustained by Sudan and operating from North Kivu province. Sudan is one of the US's so called "rogue states" which received a salvo of cruise missiles as a warning after the bombing of the US embassies in August. For its part Sudan accuses Uganda of sustaining the rebellion in the south of its territory, which, of course, Uganda is doing with US blessing.

Rwanda which has a regime installed with US help, faces armed intervention from the forces of the previous regime, the former Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR) who fled into the South Kivu region of Zaire after they were defeated. Regular attacks and massacres are carried out in Rwanda from the territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo by the FAR. The scale of the casualties in the Rwanda and South Kivu puts President Clinton's beautiful speeches about "peace making progress" into perspective. In the 1994 genocide in Rwanda approximately 1 million people were killed. In the subsequent war and consolidation of the new regime 2 million people were turned into refugees, of whom at least 1 million fled to South Kivu. In the period of the "cleansing" of the refugee camps by the new Rwandan regime, in the years 1996-7, a further 200 000 more people were killed. If one includes the people killed in the actual fighting in Rwanda and Zaire it is probable that in the last 4 years 1.3 million people have been killed in this area! It was the "cleansing" campaign which led to the overthrow of the Mobutu regime but with the complex ethnic alliances in Kivu province it has also rekindled the campaign against Rwanda. Now a further "cleansing" operation is needed.

At the West of the country the Angolan rebel movement Unita, which defies the UN brokered peace agreement, uses the

Democratic Republic of Congo as a supply route for its massive diamond smuggling operations. This group, which in former times was created and sustained by the US and S. Africa, now funds itself by illegal diamond mining in the territory it controls. It is estimated that Unita is now the world's sixth largest exporter of diamonds making an annual sum of £225 million from these operations. This income sustains it and allows it to purchase arms now that its previous backers have turned off the tap. Angola would therefore dearly love to cut this route and finish off Unita once and for all. The Angolan intervention has already paid off and part of the leadership of Unita has denounced the leadership of Savimbi and thrown their weight behind the peace agreement with the Angolan MPLA government of Dos Santos.

In both the East and the West of the country the Kabila regime has lost control militarily, failed to crush the guerrilla forces within the country and to deliver the peaceful borders its backers required.

Economic Decline and the Prospects for Central Africa

The catastrophic economic decline of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is symptomatic of a more general decline of the entire region of sub-Saharan Africa and is testimony to the desperate state of capitalism in Africa. The region is burdened with massive debts to the developed nations, and hopelessly short of the capital investment which it is quite unable to generate itself. In 1996 it attracted only 3% of the global investment going to developing countries, while in the period between the 1950's and the 90's its share of world trade has shrunk from 3% to 1%. Average income, which was 14% of that of an average of industrialised countries in 1965, had shrunk to 7% by the mid 90's. In 1996 the economy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo had shrunk to the level of 1958, i.e. pre-independence levels, and GNP per head had shrunk from \$1400 in 1958 to \$100. Copper production, the country's main export, had declined from 475 000 tonnes in the mid 80's to

38 000 tonnes in 1996, and the Republic is saddled with a debt of \$14bn.

The situation the Democratic Republic of the Congo finds itself in today is a direct consequence of the workings of imperialism. Under capitalism only a massive investment of capital can reverse this situation. However, although the world is awash with capital searching for profitable investment it will only be invested where profit rates are sufficient to make this worthwhile and the usual guarantees of repatriation of profits, open capital markets etc. exist. In the current crisis only the most rapid sources of profit are interesting to finance capital and the Congo, lacking the infrastructure to provide this is therefore not on the list of desirable investment havens. For investment to occur it is necessary for the Democratic Republic of the Congo to throw itself at the feet of international capital and follow the prescriptions of the World Bank and the IMF and its US masters. Such a policy could produce a brief recovery for the area but on the terms of international capital and, as the crisis in S/E Asia shows, these "economic recoveries" are short-lived things. In the longer term it is capitalism itself which is the problem and the only solution is the destruction of capitalism and its replacement by the communist system of production, which has nothing to do with the state capitalist systems which existed in Russia and elsewhere. The only force capable of doing this is the working class. In this area of Africa the working class has been conspicuously absent from the events of this decade, which has permitted the local bourgeoisie to channel the problems of capitalism into wars fought out under the banners of various ethnic groups just as has occurred in the Balkans. The atrocities and the genocide committed by the bourgeoisie have been on the scale of Genghis Khan. Unless the working class is able to regroup itself and unite with the international working class to oppose the plans of the local and international bourgeoisie the butchery in

central Africa will continue. Those workers who understand the need for reviving the class struggle and answering these atrocities with a class response should form a communist organisation through which they can link themselves to the international communist movement to clarify the best way of achieving this.

CP

Previous issue

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Ireland — A Settlement for Global Capital

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The Second Greatest Robbery in History; Or How the US Government Is Looting the Social Security Pension Fund.

CWO Introduction

The capitalist attacks on the working class are both united globally and take remarkably similar forms. Cutting state spending as much as they socially dare is a hallmark of New Labour (see article in this issue) and the Clinton regime. The article that follows by International Bureau sympathisers in the USA was distributed at demonstrations in Los Angeles. It only serve to underline the need for the kind of work that the International Bureau is doing today.

The Second Greatest Robbery...

For the past several years now, the ruling class, with plenty of help from their loyal servants in the corporate media and in government, have been promoting the Big Lie that the Social Security system is about to go belly up in the not-too-distant future. The self-serving purpose of this campaign has been another attempt to manipulate public opinion into (1), believing that a crisis really does exist and (2), accepting the inevitable cuts in

their Social Security benefits that will be carried out under the guise of "reforms."

The very same politicians, Republicans and Democrats alike, who for years have been gleefully swinging the budget-cutting axe, slashing social programs to the bone in order to finance big tax breaks for the rich, are coming forward with their remedies to "save" Social Security. Their solutions are nothing but poison pills that workers, including the unemployed and retirees, should refuse to swallow without a fight. To paraphrase the German poet Bertolt Brecht, a bit loosely perhaps, whenever you hear the government talking about "reforms" these days, that's the time to barricade your front door and tighten your grip on your wallet.

In 1983, the government created what's known as the Social Security Trust Fund, ostensibly to ensure that payroll taxes directed into the Fund would be used to pay retiree benefits —only. Currently the fund is taking in about \$50 billion per year more than is being paid out in benefits. The fund is also invested in US Treasury securities which yields an additional \$50 billion or so per year. What this adds up to is that the system is actually running a surplus of nearly \$100 billion per year. (*LA Times* 2/16/98) If this be the case, then what's all the worry?

The only reason the so-called Social Security "crisis" exists at all is because the government, in its appointed role as Robin Hood In Reverse, is once more stealing from the working class in order to give

to the rich. In this case the government has been, as they put it, "borrowing" the surplus money from the Fund and using it as part of the "unified Federal budget." In this way it can then be used to help pay, for example, the \$300 Billion annually forked over to the Pentagon or the hundreds of billions given away each year to US corporations for tax rebates and various subsidies.

It is testimony to the skill of the American ruling class's public relations propaganda machine that it could get away with calling the coming proposals to reduce benefits, increase the age of retirement, and hand over billions of our dollars of pension fund money to the sharks on Wall Street, a "reform." Some intentional fallout from this manufactured scare campaign has been the pitting of one section of workers against another. Many younger workers have swallowed the bait and believe they are paying into an already moribund system that's about to be bled dry by those too-numerous ageing baby boomers. Naturally left out of the discussion by the big business controlled media is the trifling little fact that Social Security would continue to operate as a viable system if not for the Democratic and Republican Party politicians who have been looting the Fund for years to pay for everything but pension benefits.

President Clinton has called for a year of "discussion." So for the next several months, the administration will be busily scurrying about the countryside holding some of its typically sham "town hall meetings" at which they will be "listening to the people" in an attempt to build a consensus for their al-

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ready decided on "reforms." Meanwhile the real discussions on how Social Security will be "reformed" will be made behind the scenes the political representatives, think tanks and lobbyists for the big corporations and banks. Release of the government's "Structural Adjustment Program" for Social Security will most certainly be delayed until after the November '98 congressional elections. In that way the Democratic and Republican Party candidates can continue posing as champions of the elderly, willing, no doubt to fight to the death to protect their pension fund. After the elections, however, crocodile tears will flow as these same politicians reluctantly "explain" the 'hard choices' that

had to be made if "we" are to "save" Social Security.

Just how are the working class people going to successfully hold the line against these vicious governmental (read: Corporate) assaults on our standard of living? There are no easy answers. No guarantees. But if workers are going to have even a fighting chance at all, they must first realize the class nature of all the political/economic battles that confront us on a daily basis. From the fight for universal health care, against unemployment and speed ups, for high quality education available to all, a clean and safe environment, to the preservation of our retirement fund, it is essential that working class people

become conscious of themselves as a class and learn to recognize the capitalist class forces that stand between us and our aspirations. Most importantly, following this heightened understanding, the working class can themselves realize the necessity of building our own revolutionary organizations, industrial and political, with which to confront our tormentors in the class struggle.

Steve, *Los Angeles Workers' Voice*

This article also appeared in *Internationalist Notes 15* which contains the articles "US Imperialism on the Move" (see page 22 of this publication) and "The Role of Religion in the US".

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Parliamentarism and Communism Part 3

Proletarian Democracy and Bourgeois Democracy — the Revolutionary Wave after World War One

In our previous two articles in this series, (in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 6 and 9) we showed how Marx, Engels, Lenin and others saw the question of parliamentarism. It was never a way to working class emancipation. Whilst reforms might be gained through the medium of parliament these were fragile — as easily taken away as given. The democratic revolution was something which simply cleared the decks so that the real battle between working class and capitalist class could take place. Universal suffrage was nothing more than the veil which masked the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. By the time of the Paris Commune (1871), Marx and Engels were clear that the working class could not take over the existing state machinery. It would have to be smashed.

However after the deaths of Marx (1883), and particularly, Engels in 1896 (see our article on his fight against “democratism” in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 1) social democracy came to rely on parliamentary antics more and more. As we saw in part two of this series the 2nd International, and in particular its right wing and centre, the Bernsteins, the Jaurés, the Turatis, emphasised the use of parliament as the basic tactic and strategy of a reformist or revised ‘socialism’. Both perversions of Marxism, reformism and revisionism, were opposed within the International by those who defended revolutionary communism. As Lenin was to put it after the First World War,

it would be very absurd to think that the most profound revolution in the history of mankind, that the first transference of power from the exploiting minority to the exploited

majority that has ever occurred in the world, could proceed within the old framework of the old bourgeois parliamentary democracy, that it could proceed without extremely sharp changes, without creating new forms of democracy, new institutions embodying the new conditions for its application, etc.

Lenin, “Theses and report on bourgeois democracy and the dictatorship of the proletariat”, 1st Congress of the Communist International, March 4th 1919.

1914 to 1917, Imperialism, War and Revolution

The period up to the First World War saw the rise of a new stage of capitalism — imperialism. Its fruit was the generalised imperialist slaughter of 1914 war. This demonstrated that capitalism had now entered its period of “parasitism and decay”, as Lenin put it in 1916. The war showed what capitalist democracy really had to offer.

The imperialist war of 1914-18 finally revealed even to the least conscious workers the true character of bourgeois democracy even in the freest republics as the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. For the sake of the enrichment of the German or the English group of millionaires or billionaires, tens of millions were killed, and the military dictatorship of the bourgeoisie was set up even in the freest of republics It was precisely the war that most of all opened the eyes of the toilers, tore

down the garlands of artificial flowers which decorated bourgeois democracy and revealed to the people the enormous speculation and profiteering that was going on ...

Lenin, as above.

The Social Democrats of the Second International now had their opportunity to stand by their decisions at the 1912 Basle congress to oppose the war. Instead they chose the path of the class collaboration and betrayal of the working class. They dutifully either voted for war budgets or they stood passively to one side in their various parliaments. The place of parliament was put in its proper context here as the social democrats waited for parliamentary ‘business as usual’ to resume after the war.

The main thing the socialists fail to understand and what constitutes their theoretical short-sightedness, their captivity to bourgeois prejudices and their political treachery to the proletariat, is that in capitalist society, as soon as there is any serious intensification of the class struggle on which it is based, there cannot be any middle ground between the dictatorship of bourgeoisie and the dictatorship of the proletariat. All dreams about some third course are merely the lamentations of the petty bourgeoisie. This is confirmed by more than a hundred years of development of bourgeois democracy and of the labour movement in all the advanced countries, and particularly by the experience of the past five years ...

Lenin, as above.

Nevertheless there were significant sections of all socialist parties which tried to find that way. The Italian Socialist Party (PSI) avoided the whole issue simply because the Italian bourgeoisie had not yet made up his mind into which imperialist camp it would fall. The PSI thus called two international conferences in neutral Switzerland (Zimmerwald in 1915 and Kienthal in 1916) to try to end the war on a pacifist basis. The majority of those there were centrists à la Kautsky but a revolutionary minority of the Left around Lenin rightly saw these pacifists and centrists as traitors to the working class too. This Zimmerwald Left, a precursor of the Third International had its own manifesto.

The imperialist war is ushering in the era of the social revolution. All the objective conditions of recent times have put the workers' revolutionary mass struggles on the order of the day. It is the duty of socialists, while making every use of every means of the working class's legal struggle, to ... develop the workers' revolutionary action, and do everything possible to turn the imperialist war between peoples into a civil war ... for the conquest of political power by the working class, and the realisation of socialism.

Resolution of the Zimmerwald Left, 1915.

This was, of course a minority at the time but the war itself eventually brought about a working class response. Whilst the pacifists and centrists wrung their hands in despair at the barbarism of imperialism (they wanted the war to be over so they could get back to peaceful parliamentary debate) the working class began to undermine the war machines in every country. In 1917 revolution in Russia overthrew the Tsar, strikes in Germany began and the French army refused to attack any more. In August 1917 Lenin wrote 'The State and Revolution'.

State and Revolution

In 'State and Revolution' Lenin restates the analysis made by Engels and then Marx concerning the state

...the state is an organ of class rule, an organ for the oppression of one class by another...

and then again

Petty-bourgeois democracy is never able to understand that the state is the organ of the rule of a definite class which cannot be reconciled with its antipode (the class opposite).

Lenin, State and Revolution.

Given the betrayal of the working class by social democracy he reiterated the views of both Marx and Engels concerning the state. A lesson that the 'official' socialists had either forgotten or abandoned, namely, that the capitalist state is not something which can be used by the working class, showing that those parties of the 2nd International, now defunct, had become mere 'petty bourgeois democrats'.

Lenin used 'State and Revolution', in part, to mark out the communist position in 1917 as opposed to that of not only the avowed supporters of capital but also those he described as

petty bourgeois democrats with near-Socialist phraseology

In doing this he echoes Engels

We must also note that Engels very definitely calls universal suffrage an instrument of bourgeois rule.

Universal suffrage, he says, obviously summing up the long experience of German Social Democracy is ...an index of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the modern state.... The petty bourgeois democrats, such as our Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks, and also their twin brothers, the social chauvinists and opportunists of Western Europe, all expect 'more' from universal suffrage. They themselves share and instil into the minds of the people the wrong idea that universal suffrage 'in the modern state' is really capable of expressing the will of the majority of the toilers and of ensuring its realisation.

Lenin, State and Revolution.

As Lenin made clear, the realisation of the will of workers could only be

achieved by revolution, the installation of the dictatorship of the proletariat (meaning nothing more than the working class 'organised as the ruling class' in opposition to the capitalist class and seeking its full removal) and proletarian democracy. Nothing could be done to realise the historical tasks of the working class by the use of bourgeois democracy as proposed by the 'official' parties of that time. If the working class was to retreat back into the 'pig-sty of bourgeois parliamentarism', then the working class would put itself back into servitude under its class enemy.

Proletarian democracy

In short, the new phase of imperialism had demonstrated that capitalism was now in decay. The proletarian revolution was on the agenda. Past support for democracy in the abstract now had to be replaced with a more precise idea of the differences between how the bourgeoisie saw democracy (a fig leaf to hide its own dictatorship) and the proletarian view of what democracy must mean.

Democracy means equality. The great significance of the proletariat's struggle for equality and the significance of equality as a slogan will be clear if we correctly interpret it as meaning the abolition of classes. But democracy only means formal equality. As soon as equality is obtained for all members of society in relation to the ownership of the means of production, [...] humanity will inevitably go beyond formal equality to real equality, i.e., to applying the rule 'from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs'. By what stages, by what practical measures humanity will proceed to this higher aim — we do not know and cannot know. But it is important to realise how infinitely mendacious is the ordinary bourgeois conception of socialism as something lifeless, petrified, fixed once and for all, whereas in reality only under socialism will a rapid, genuine, really mass movement, embracing first the majority and then the whole of the population,

commence in all spheres of social and individual life.

Lenin, as above.

For Lenin, as for Marx, the solution was to turn the notion of representation into a working process, abolishing the body which merely talks and serves to hide from the sight of workers those who really do the work of governing for the capitalist class. The historically discovered form of proletarian democracy was the soviet or the workers' council which sprang up in Russia in 1905 and re-emerged in 1917. The principle of workers' councils was that they were a form of direct representation. Delegates are not elected to do as they please for five years but to carry out the mandates with which they were sent. If they don't, then they are recalled instantly.

every elected person is liable to recall

Lenin, as above.

These bodies are both the governing body and the law makers of society.

the electors are the toiling and exploited masses; the bourgeoisie is excluded....

all bureaucratic formalism and restriction of elections are abolished; the masses themselves determine the order and time of elections

Lenin, The Immediate Tasks of Soviet Government, March 1918

The workers as a whole are involved through such bodies in the running of all aspects of their own everyday lives.

Our aim is to draw the whole of the poor into the practical work of administration

Lenin, as above.

These bodies will be organised from a local level in a series of steps to encompass the whole of the territory commanded by the revolutionary working class, which will eventually mean the whole world.

Parliament against the Revolutionary Wave

In October the working class of Russia put the ideas contained in "The State and Revolution" into practice and concretely posed the question of in-

ternational revolution by overthrowing the Provisional Government made up of landowners and capitalists. Soviet power had triumphed over a discredited parliamentarism. The revolutionary wave seemed to be reaching Germany in 1918 (see *Revolutionary Perspectives* 9, "The German November Revolution"). Workers' councils were set up but this organisational form on its own was simply not enough to guarantee the progress of the revolution. With the SPD (and even the USPD), the social democrats, still wedded to Second International notions, having a huge representation within the councils it is hardly surprising that counter-revolution came out of such a situation. The leadership of the SPD, Noske, Ebert and Scheidemann were wholly counter-revolutionary. They had an agenda containing one major point — the re-establishment of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. Some of these "socialists" even wanted the Kaiser to remain. In December 1918, by 348 votes to 98, the SPD dominated workers' and soldiers councils voted for elections to the National Assembly. The SPD, the only really national organisation in Germany, got 11.5 million votes. This was to give them the legitimacy they needed to carry out their task of saving the discredited German capitalist class. The SPD then set up and financed the *Freikorps*, which not only murdered Luxemburg and Leibknecht, but went on to massacre thousands of workers. Bourgeois democracy always reveals its iron fist when the workers see through its veil of parliamentary lies.

The International and Parliamentarism

The Third (Communist) International was founded in 1919 on the basis of Lenin's calls during the war and in his "April Theses". It was also a logical result of the proletarian success in Russia. The Russian revolutionaries were well aware that there was no future for an isolated revolution in Russia. The Russian Revolution was only the first step towards a world revolution. The First Congress met in Moscow and was attended by international delegates from several countries, though as yet there were few large communist parties or organisa-

tions outside Russia. Indeed the tragedy for the Third International was that it took the parties in Western and Central Europe some considerable time to get beyond the manoeuvres of the parliamentary wings of the old Socialist parties. The time lost also coincided with the passing of the revolutionary moment in many countries so that when the Second Congress of the International took place the revolutionary wave was already in decline. The First Congress however issued the "Platform of the Communist International" (mainly drafted by Bukharin). This Platform summed up the whole working class experience of the previous decade and directly posed the opposition of workers' councils to bourgeois parliaments. It is worth quoting at length.

The highly touted general "will of the people" is no more real than national unity. In reality, classes confront each other with antagonistic, irreconcilable wills. But since the bourgeoisie is a small minority, it needs this fiction, this illusion of a national "will of the people", these high-sounding words, to consolidate its rule over the working class and impose its own class will on the proletariat. By contrast the proletariat, the overwhelming majority of the population, openly wields the class power of its mass organisations, its councils, in order to abolish the privileges of the bourgeoisie and to safeguard the transition to a classless, communist society. Bourgeois democracy puts the primary emphasis on purely formal declarations of rights and freedoms, which are beyond the reach of working people, the proletarians and the semi-proletarians, who lack the material resources to exercise them. Meanwhile, the bourgeoisie uses its material resources, through its press and organisations, to deceive and betray the people. In contrast, the council system, the new type of state power, assigns the highest priority to enabling the proletariat to exercise its rights and freedom. The power of the councils gives the best palaces, buildings, printing plants, paper stocks, and so forth

Continued on page 22

US Imperialism on the Move

Introduction

We are reproducing here a text from Internationalist Notes 15, showing how the US turns world events to its own advantage.

US Imperialism on the Move

The US governments attacks in Afghanistan and Sudan recently caused the deaths of at least 21 people in Afghanistan and 5 deaths in Sudan. Government officials claimed "strong evidence" against Sultan Osama Ben Laden but declined to provide any details for this evidence. The Sudanese government stated that a pharmaceutical plant was destroyed and not a chemical warfare plant. The strike in Sudan sparked angry protests at the US embassy.

It is crucial to note that the site in Afghanistan that was bombed was one of those set up by the CIA in the holy war against the former Soviet Union. At the time the Reagan regime called these Taliban "freedom fighters". The US government quietly encouraged the Taliban to take over at the expense of the warring military factions in Afghanistan in order to create stability for US interests in Central Asia. This was at the same time that the US was praising the Taliban for its efforts in the "war on drugs", because they were eliminating

the traditional economy of hashish in favor of the more lucrative commodity, heroin (the US ignored this part).

The US is also involved in the war in Sudan against the government in Khartoum and backing the Christian fundamentalist army of Southern Sudan in a war where famine is a weapon and the killing never stops. The Sudan is another key to gaining greater influence for Uncle Sam in Africa largely at the expense of France whose reaction the attacks was remarkably mixed. So by launching the missiles US imperialism is taking care of two things at once, striking a blow against the Taliban who proved useless to American interests and against the regime in the Sudan which the US government also sees as key to its interests.

American workers are told that they must be ready for further attacks and that by virtue of "America's Leadership" they can look forward to further actions by the state in their defence. In other words this is just the beginning of yet another new and bloody conflict.

The bourgeois press immediately jumped forward in debating whether the attack was similar the Hollywood movie Wag the Dog. This was a diversion from the fact that one of our former freedom fighters is now fighting against the US government.

There is a double dynamic at work, the US government is involved in an increasingly bitter factional struggle between Democrat and Republican factions of the ruling class at the same time it is also engaged in a struggle against the little imperialisms abroad (Haiti, Iraq, Panama and now Sudan and Afghanistan) that have shown more independent nationalist tendencies. The US government is clearly in an offensive against those former allies that have chosen to turn against their imperialist patron. This also serves to show our allies that the US is still the strongest imperialist power in the world.

Workers all over the world can look forward to more war and more violence. The US propaganda machine will continue to fabricate a false consensus and the ruling class will continue rule us like gods until workers wake up and fight back.

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Proletarian Democracy and Bourgeois Democracy — the Revolutionary Wave after World War One

Continued from page 21

to the people for their newspapers, meetings and organisations. Only thus does real proletarian democracy even become possible... Under the council system the mass organisations govern and through them the masses themselves, since the councils involve a constantly increasing number of workers in administering the state. Only in

this way is the entire working population gradually integrated into actually governing.

This is a document of more than historical interest since it could easily be an analysis of the conditions prevailing today.

It was a tragedy for the working class that by the time the 2nd Congress in 1920 was convened a year later the revo-

lutionary wave was already declining and in many countries there was still no clearly formed communist party. In these conditions the question of the use of parliamentarism once again came to the fore but in an entirely new way. It is to this question that we will turn in the next part of this series.

Clastre/AD

The Legacy of May '68 and the Course of History —

Brief Response to the ICC

In *World Revolution* 216 (July/August 1998) the International Communist Current in Britain published a report of their London Public Forum on May '68. This was largely dominated by a discussion between members and sympathisers of the CWO and ICC about the significance of May '68 for today. The report in itself breaks new ground in that it carefully outlines the debate which actually took place and attempts to give as honest an account as possible of our views. This is without precedent in the last quarter of a century of exchanges between our two organisations in the UK. It has to be welcomed as a healthy development for the future of the internationalist communist left.

The CWO/IBRP has spent the last few years trying to get communists of various organisations to debate more seriously (or rather debate at all). We even included a "Open Space" in our paper in which we printed articles by those we did not necessarily agree with. The ICC at first rejected this policy because it included groups like Subversion and the now-defunct Communist Bulletin Group. Whilst we characterised these groups as confused the ICC claimed they were simply "parasites" on the Communist Left. This is still a terminology and a methodology we reject. If other organisations want to pick the best ideas of the Communist Left then we see the next step as making them accept the total coherence of what we are saying. This will not necessarily be successful (Subversion, for example, have drifted more and more into the anarchist swamp) but that does not invalidate the policy. The Communist Left is not so well known that we can refuse any forum in which to put over our views.

The ICC's new-found willingness to debate on what we actually said has come as something of a shock to many

CWO supporters. After all it is only just over a year since their international press was proclaiming that the CWO itself was also "parasitic". We have dealt with this elsewhere (see "The Political Roots of the ICC's Organisational Malaise" in *Internationalist Communist* 15 and "Sects, Lies and the Lost Perspectives of the ICC" in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 5). Much of the ICC's hostility seems to have been the product of a crisis within their largest section in France. We do not think the ICC have fully dealt with this crisis, which they deem to be solely organisational, but which seems to have had a political kernel (the resignations seem to have been largely from those whose view of history and organisation relate more to the German Left and its legatee councilism than the majority). Certainly, at the public forum on May '68, it was noted by our comrades that the ICC claimed that we shared a common heritage with the Italian Left, whereas, previously, they have tended to claim that all the communist lefts (particularly also the German and Dutch Left) made some contribution to the politics of the ICC. Certainly, this is to be welcomed, but, as usual with these subtle ICC changes, we are left to surmise rather than given a clear indication of a change in orientation.

What was welcome and clearly signalled was a recognition (which for us was the first time it had been said in public) that the ICC had exaggerated the significance of the 1980's as "years of truth" and had given the impression that there would be "decisive class confrontations" but had gradually backed off from this. This was said from the platform of the meeting but the actual account of the meeting in WR216 does not actually report it. Instead it returns to the usual ICC argument that the ICC had concluded that the decisive class confrontations had occurred but neither

the working class nor the capitalists had been victorious. We will return to this issue at the end since it is the question which the ICC have asked us to comment on and which currently holds the seeds of most of our differences.

Let us first record the agreements. As the ICC put it

May '68 was indeed an expression of the class struggle, and the moving force behind it was the re-emerging economic crisis, even if the latter was still very much at the initial stages: likewise that the unions and the left were the main enemies of the movement.

there was also an accord that May '68 did inaugurate a series of major class confrontations (Italy '69, Poland '70, Britain '72, etc.) and that the CWO themselves, like the ICC, owed their very existence to this upsurge of the proletariat.

Even quoting this point of agreement however makes us uncomfortable. Why? Because there are already one or two methodological issues to deal with. First the unions and the Left grew enormously after May '68 as capital used them as instruments to contain the working class struggle. But they did so not simply because the workers were "mystified" in ICC terminology but because the workers themselves had not gone beyond the idea that capitalism could be made to work for them. We found this to our cost when we issued a leaflet in thousands at the factory gates and distributed it in 1976. It was called "Is the worst over?". In it we predicted that the crisis would get worse and the unions and the then Labour Government would be the instruments of further attacks on the working class. The workers threw it away in their hundreds (thus initiating the view inside the CWO that the leaflet should have been called "Is this the worst ever?"). It was followed

by a split in the CWO as its Liverpool section tried to find solace in localist activism. The ICC itself had a similar activist split which ended up with the splitters disappearing from political life in 1981. It was clear to us before then that the legacy of May '68 was already receding.

The ICC however maintained that the working class was still making advances and pointed to "waves of struggle" in which the included the Polish events of 1980, the Belgian dockers strikes of 1983 (but not the British miners' strike as this was "corporatist"). The 1980's were going to be the "years of truth" when the great issues of history were to be settled. The CWO and the IBRP never shared this apocalyptic vision. We said that though the episodes the ICC pointed to did show workers beginning to question the old labour movement that is now totally linked to capitalism, the tide of struggle was receding. When the Stalinist Bloc finally collapsed after years of total stagnation the ICC concluded that the "years of truth" had not in fact resolved anything. Their explanation was that neither the proletariat nor the capitalists had been able to impose their solution on history. The result is that we are in a new phase of history "the decomposition of capitalism", "of growing chaos at all levels". The ICC now pose the question that

the dilemma that was clearly posed during the period of the two imperialist blocs — world war or world revolution — has been complicated by the possibility that capitalism's own decomposition may on the one hand prevent the re-formation of the stable alliances needed for a new world war; but on the other hand, if the descent into chaos went far enough, it could still destroy the objective and subjective bases for the communist revolution. In short capitalism could bury the prospect of communism in a series of catastrophes (military, social, ecological etc.) without first actively mobilising the proletariat behind its objectives. But we don't think that this point has yet been reached; consequently the course towards massive class confrontations, impelled by the

deepening economic crisis of the system, remains very much alive, and revolutionaries have to know how to put forward this perspective in their intervention and in their work towards the formation of the party. (WR216 p.6)

There is much we can agree with here. In fact we can say welcome aboard to the perspectives we have held for the best part of two decades! Our disagreements are about how the ICC has arrived at these perspectives. We find their methodology both schematic and abstract. For us "decomposition" or whatever we call the current stage of the crisis is the working out of capitalist logic. We have stated many times that capitalism is at the end of a cycle of accumulation and cannot get out of its current stagnation and paralysis without some major devaluation of capital. At first it tried more Keynesianism then monetarism and today both policies are in ruins (so much so that they Keynesians are making a comeback — even monetarists like Patrick Minsford are calling for more state intervention). In short capitalism is at an impasse. Globally the tensions are rising as each state weighs up how it can get one up on its rivals (and increasingly it is difficult to see the stable alliances needed for general imperialist war appearing soon). This presages further famines, wars and disasters. However the reason that this thirty year crisis continues is because the proletariat has given no response. It is not fear of proletarian response that prevents war at the moment but the lack of any obvious gains for the various imperialist powers. The consequences of the last thirty years have seen the disaggregation of the working class on a global level (something the ICC seems to wish to avoid analysing) and at the same time we have seen only a slow growth of the internationalist communist organisations. This latter factor is one of the surest indicators of at most a gradual maturation of consciousness in the class ("subterranean" included). It cannot be ignored.

None of this means that we think the perspective of proletarian revolution is off the historical agenda. It does mean that we think it is along way off and requires an enormous effort on the part of revolutionaries to transform themselves from propagandists to being part

of a new class movement. This we tried to address in the "Perspectives for the Coming Period" which we published in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 5. An important factor in this has to be a growing collective resistance of masses of workers to the continuing attacks of capital. Until now this has been difficult as the attacks have tended to be first in this country or now in that industry. This has tended to lead to isolated struggles which have inevitably been defeated. However the continuing downturn in the world economy is now becoming more generalised. For all their limitations the French strikes of 1995 and the Danish general strike of 1997 both show that the tradition of collective struggle has not disappeared. If communists take part in such movements and don't stand on the sidelines then they can actively develop an alternative solution to the various ones on offer from all capitalist factions.

However to do this we have to avoid the schematism to which the ICC is so addicted. In the WR216 article the ICC state that

the CWO's apparent rejection of the possibility of anticipating the overall course of events is also a rejection of the work carried out in this vital field by Marxists throughout the history of the workers' movement.

If this is the case then the Marxists have a poor record. Let us leave aside the usual (but irrelevant) example of Marx after the 1848 revolutions and look at the Italian Left in the 1930's. Whilst they did some good work in trying to come to terms with the terrible defeat of the revolutionary wave after the First World War they basically theorised themselves out of existence just before the Second Imperialist Slaughter. Revolutionary organisation (the party) is a permanent need of the working class under decadent capitalism whatever the historical circumstances. These circumstances merely dictate the way in which the party operates and the policies it pursues. Thus in the debate on May '68 an ICC sympathiser threw at us the accusation that we would have been lost in August 1914 when the Socialist parties went over to the bourgeoisie. We retorted that in fact it is the ICC's current method that would have led to them

concluding that the workers were defeated and therefore there was nothing to be done. No-one replied to this in the meeting. Lenin was at first isolated and ridiculed for raising the banner of revolution in 1914 in response to the betrayal of the working class by Social Democracy. It was using this schematic approach that led the founder of the ICC to decamp from Europe for 15 years because he believed that nuclear war was inevitable when the Korean War started. Trying to forecast the outcome of the class struggle in fine detail isn't theory, but idle speculation, and does not seriously inform the work of com-

munists today. When we look at the work of past revolutionaries we are again struck by the refusal of the Bolshevik Party to be the prisoner of past schemas. If it had been then the "April Theses" of 1917 would never have been adopted and there would have been no October Revolution. The Bolsheviks would still have contented themselves with a "democratic revolution". As Lenin was often fond of saying, the best parties are not those who do not make mistakes in their expectations but they are the ones who respond to a changing reality. Anchoring ourselves in current reality is the only basis for revolution-

ary politics. Revolutionaries today have no choice but to work for revolution whatever the obstacles. We will not be deflected even by major setbacks to the class (which in themselves might be the springboard for new forms of resistance). We do not theorise about the existence or non-existence of the counter-revolution but do what we can to prepare for working class revolution. Our broad historical projection is that capitalism only offers barbarism and only the proletariat offers humanity a future. We think this is a sufficient and realistic perspective to base our work on.

CWO

Correspondence with *Kamunist Kranti*

Continued from page 28

problem is how this might come about. We say that some workers will, through their real experience see the need to do so before others. If what they have learned from their process of political self-education is not to be lost then they need to band together in an international structure to pass the lessons on to the rest of the class. We call this a political party. This will come about not just because some communists advocate it but because of the practical necessity to unite to defeat the state capitalists and finance capitalist of all shades of bourgeois opinion. This party will not be a ruling class in embryo but an international political guide towards the defeat of the class enemy. The actual creation of communism, on the other hand, is the work of the masses themselves. Perhaps you could concretely address these issues yourself in your next reply?

3. As for all your other patronising points ("If your situation does not permit conversation with wage workers at large, do read some management manuals..."), the answer is posed by

your ultimate sentence, "End of hierarchies is end of class rule". It is in fact the other way round. Your view is the same as another renegade from bourgeois leftism (though in his case he is an ex-Trotskyist not an ex-Maoist) Paul Cardan (alias Cornelius Castoriadis, Pierre Chaulieu etc). He also decided that class categories could not explain modern capitalism and that the real contradiction in society was between "order-givers" and "order-takers". This profundity had him (and his offspring "Socialisme ou Barbarie" in France and "Solidarity"

hierarchical models are more productive ("team working" we think they call it). Anti-hierarchical verbiage is not anti-capitalism. Only the destruction of the class structure of capitalism by the working class (and thereby their own abolition as a class) will remove the condition of exploitation on which hierarchies are constructed. Your failure to recognise this means that you are more and more abandoning the cardinal gains of the working class so painfully acquired over the last 200 years.

We have asked a comrade to review your pamphlet on political economy and sincerely hope that it contains less ~~charlatanism~~ than your correspondence.

Teamwork is a winner

Teamworking is growing in popularity in the organisation of work in UK businesses and organisations, according to a survey published this week by the Industrial Society, the independent employment body.

In a survey of 723 employers across the UK it found 86 per cent of them stating there was more teamworking in their workplace than two or three years ago.

More than 60 per cent of employers said the increase was due to the devolution of responsibility in the workplace.

Financial Times, May 20, 1998.

in Britain) from running around ready to hail the latest state capitalist expression (from Tito's Yugoslavia to post-colonial Algeria) as examples of workers' "self-management". The management manuals you so loftily refer to long ago concluded that anti-

ence so far.

Internationalist greetings

Jock, for the CWO

Correspondence with *Kamunist Kranti*

(Continued)

We are reproducing here the exchange of emails between ourselves and Kamunist Kranti, which should have been published in Revolutionary Perspectives 11. We apologise for this error, which resulted in the immediately previous exchange being republished.

The present emails will be of interest for their discussion of our differences with KK regarding the fundamental division in society: class or "hierarchies".

Kamunist Kranti's Letter

Reply to CWO\BRP letter dt.5.06.97
from KK

June 16, 1997 Faridabad, India

Dear ER,

Received your e-mail of 5th June, 1997. Thank you. We take this opportunity to engage with some issues emerging from your letter.

1) We are a little taken aback by your bold-bald assertion that "the boom that followed the IInd World War gave workers in the metropolises an unprecedented high standard of living". Our indices for measuring the standard of living of wage-workers are:

- a) Intensity of work
- b) Rate of exploitation
- c) Duration of working-day

Does it need an elaboration to assert that all these three indices have risen exponentially especially after the IInd World War? We were under the impression that you agreed to this since you published our write-up, "The Working Year and The Working Day" in *Workers Voice* three years ago.

Galbraiths and McNamaras harp about the standard of living of wage-workers in units of TV antennas and

dishwashers. It is very distressing to see the same logic underlying your assertions. What is understandable in Galbraith *et al.* is unpardonable when it comes from CWO\BRP. To us it is a sad reflection of your distance from wage-workers lives.

2) Your understanding of wage-workers resistances and struggles in terms of big, unifocal (around a charter of demands on the basis of a factory, a branch of production or a region) mobilisations of wage-workers implies the dependence of wage-workers on leaders.

This is anachronistic in a milieu where all the traditional modes of organisations which imply representation have been discredited and/or rejected because they have been found to be counter-productive and dangerous by wage-workers at large. This rejection you are aware of but because of your distance from wage-workers you have theorized it as apathy among workers.

If your situation does not permit conversation with wage-workers at large, do read some management manuals wherein you would find the basic premise of all managerial theory & practice, strategy & tactics is that wage-workers are against work, against discipline, against productivity. It would be pertinent to talk with managers to figure out whether the workers are apathetic or highly creative in their resistances and struggles. Isn't it strange that apathetic wage-workers have given rise to astronomical progress in surveillance industry, especially after IInd World War? Reality is complex comrades!

3) What you condescendingly call "workplace skirmishes" are to us the smouldering coal seams burning away the foundations of capital. These simmering layers of anti-work, anti-discipline, anti-productivity acts are the

foundations for imaginatively inventing non-hierarchical production relations and non-wage labour based social formation.

"Workplace skirmishes" is the terminology that managements and representatives-leaders routinely use in attempts to downplay, to counter and to erase from workers memory the steps that wage-workers take on their own. Constant attempts are made to channelise resistances and struggles into big unifocal events for which managements, representatives and state

apparatus are geared to control, crush and manage. Efforts are made to keep alive these spectacular events as glorious defeats of wage-workers. It is not an accident that the language of bravery, heroism and martyrdom is routinely parroted by hierarchies to browbeat the meek, small, puny little wage-workers and sustain apparatuses of extraction, eradication and discipline.

4) Imaginative inventions of wage-workers are not taking place in thin air, just like the imaginations of "exceptionally talented or skilled individuals" but are grounded in historical experiences and memories. Memories which include the fact that the key political texts of revolutionary organisations have been published, translated and popularised through millions of copies by Stalin, Mao and their protégés throughout the world. Routine resistances and struggles of wage-workers are the only means by which any key political text can be validated, modified or invalidated. Debates and discussions without direct experiences of resistances and struggles cannot produce any imagination of a future without capital. If this were not so, marxist academicians would have been true communist visionaries.

5) "The nature of capitalist society and the capitalist state" that we have learnt from "workplace skirmishes" and the redundancy of big unifocal struggles are:

The concepts of capitalist and private property are dangerous and used by the left of capital to perpetuate class rule.

Lockouts by managements and strikes by leaders are twin strategies to impose retrenchments, wage-cuts, work intensifications.

Nationalisation, statisation, privatisation are one and the same thing.

Work intensity, rate of exploitation, working day have all increased.

The "labour aristocrats" are the most exploited sections amongst the wage-workers.

Starting from a leader in a small factory to a head of state constitute a continuum for the perpetuation of hierarchies.

The rate of exploitation of wage-workers in "advanced" regions and factories is much higher than in "backward" ones.

6) A little elaboration on what we do at workplace as there seems to be some misunderstanding about it. It is a common practice at workplaces for small groups of workers on the basis of department, sections, shifts to take steps on their own (without leaders) against management practices routinely. These steps are not spontaneous but rather they are deliberate, thought over, conscious acts that read, evaluate, test and counter manage-

ment strategies. The steps by themselves are small but the premeditation is deep and elaborate. There is no bravado and no bragging. We presently engage ourselves in bringing the importance of these steps into discussion amongst wage-workers at large and actively participate in their spread. At the same time, we grapple and analyse the ideological, theoretical and practical problems which are posed in these steps amongst wage-workers at large.

As the arena of these struggles broadens to say factory level, there is a tendency of leaderships of various kinds to emerge. We participate actively in undermining this tendency and attempt to evolve alternate strategies.

7) The point is to understand wage-workers resistances & struggles and the means & methods of spreading them to make them more effective so that the system as such is challenged. The space for leader based struggles is shrinking, big unifocal struggles are being marginalised. For many it is a disaster. We welcome this.

In this situation there is a tremendous possibility of ant-hierarchical challenges on a global scale. In this context, holding on to the old modes of hierarchically organised practice sabotages the possibilities of emerging wage-workers struggles. This is the lesson we have drawn from events in Russia in this century. Communist Manifesto, volumes of Capital and other such key political texts in their millions were thrown on the faces of wage-workers to justify extreme repression and exploitation. Red cov-

ers of mitigating special circumstances were and are provided by fringe revolutionary organisations. As far as our historical experiences go we can be sure that the accentuation of wage-workers struggle would not lead to situations of red carpet welcome but rather situations with "special exigencies". Does this mean that coercive apparatuses will always be thrust on the wage-workers?

8) A basic premise underlying revolutionary organisations disturbs us a lot and requires some elaboration. Hierarchical societies do not just divide the world in exploitators and exploited, rulers and ruled, but also in enlightened and ignorant, literates and illiterates, intelligent and idiots, preachers and pupils, leaders and led, cultured and uncultured, civilised and savage, brave and the meek, etc. All great managerial treatises and manuals be they in political theory, history, culture, surveillance, medicine or other matters of mundane affairs lend their arsenal to the perpetuation of these dichotomies, which are the basic premises of all hierarchies.

We strongly feel that communist practice and leadership are not coterminous. Rather they are in contradiction to each other. Let us not reproduce the rationality of hierarchies in our fight against hierarchies. End of hierarchies is end of class rule.

Looking forward to your reply.

With greetings

Sher Singh for KK

"Only On-Line Once Every 7-10 Days"

CWO Reply

Dear Sher Singh

We have just scanned the reproduction of our correspondence which were published in two US publications, *Discussion Bulletin* and *Collective Action Notes* and have realised that you wrote another letter addressed to us on June 16th. A pity you "forgot" to send us a copy since we would have replied (as we always do). As you invited us to

begin this discussion perhaps you were inviting us to forget it?

However we now see that your position is increasingly departing from revolutionary practice altogether. Your latest letter is simply a form of wriggling to avoid the questions we posed to you in our letter of June 5th. What does KK stand for? What are its basic docu-

ments? Have you changed your positions since the Nagpur meeting in 1992? Until you answer these points you can allow yourself to say anything you like. Your latest "reply" is full of what the French call "canards".

The CWO is a political organisation with a communist political platform. Unsurprisingly, given our politics, it is

a "collective" of wage workers. We do not make a fetish of this and do not think the fact of being wage workers precludes having to have written rules. These are precisely to ensure that the organisation functions in an open, consistent and collective manner. We welcome renegades from other social classes who accept communism but we have no gurus who have no need to work for a living and no professional revolutionaries who are detached from the everyday experience of the class and depend on the organisation for survival.

Despite the fact that we have visited you in Faridabad and know precisely the situation there we have not taken advantage of this to make cheap debating points (about your proximity or distance to the working class) or to assume we can lecture you about the experience of the working class in India as you attempt to lecture us about the experience of workers in post-war Europe. On the contrary we have constantly tried to encourage you (publicising your earlier texts which were on revolutionary issues) and have corresponded with you for over a decade. Despite this you have never once sent us your agitational paper so we can read what you are saying.

To reply (very briefly) to your points.

1. When we printed your text "The Working Year and Working Day" in *Workers Voice* we were broadly in

agreement with the view that workers' lives under decadent capitalism have not improved in the way that the capitalists proclaim. However we did not realise that you are trying to argue that since the working class of the advanced capitalist world are technically more exploited (because of the higher rate of surplus value due to the deployment of more advanced technology) they are therefore as impoverished as workers in the capitalist periphery (read Marx on relative and absolute rates of surplus value). There is no use dogmatically denying the fact that by the end of the post-war boom the working class in the metropolises had better living conditions than before or since. Our own families' histories bear this out. In the 1960's we could tell the boss to stuff his job and walk into another one the next week. Or, as many did then, we could work for six months and then live on state benefit for six months. It was also, contrary to the mythology of some, a time of great militancy with factory occupations and strikes being daily occurrences. Of course this was a temporary phenomena. It was a function of the cyclical nature of capitalism (something you, as a self-proclaimed Luxemburgist, deny). We have been paying for the crisis of capitalism which opened at the end of the Sixties/beginning of the Sev-

enties ever since. Today capitalism has forced us to work at unprecedented levels of exploitation and yet this still has not solved their crisis of insufficient profitability.

2. We do not blindly focus on "big, unifocal struggles" as you put it, today. On the contrary we have been looking at how struggles in neighbourhoods, at how struggles both inside and outside workplaces offer more scope for extension than the old factoryist model (see *Internationalist Communist 16* and preceding issues). In this sense we should be exchanging more concrete information. This is why we are genuinely interested in hearing more about your experiences. However we start from the premise in every struggle of how to unite workers. For us a class-wide resistance remains the starting point for any really revolutionary struggle. You seem to start from the premise that small groups should remain small. The capitalists will be grateful for your political Proudhonism. Capitalism can put up with a thousand and one struggles in the workplace which remain on the economic level. It cannot resist a generalised breakdown of its order where workers are ready to confront the state and fight for their own interests. The

Continued on page 25

Our Basic Positions

1. We aim to become part of the future world working class party which will guide the class struggle towards the establishment of a stateless, classless, moneyless society without exploitation, national frontiers or standing armies and in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (Marx): Communism.

2. Such a society will need a revolutionary state for its introduction. This state will be run by workers' councils, consisting of instantly recallable delegates from every section of the work-

ing class. Their rule is called the dictatorship of the proletariat because it cannot exist without the forcible overthrow and keeping down of the capitalist class worldwide.

3. The first stage in this is the political organisation of class-conscious workers and their eventual union into an international political party for the promotion of world revolution.

4. The Russian October Revolution of 1917 remains a brilliant inspiration for us. It showed that workers could overthrow the capitalist class. Only the isolation and decimation of the Russian working class destroyed their revolutionary vision of 1917. What was set up in Russia in the 1920's and after was not communism but centrally planned

state capitalism. There have as yet been no communist societies anywhere in the world.

5. The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party was founded by the heirs of the Italian Left who tried to fight the political degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern in the 1920's. We are continuing the task which the Russian Revolution promised but failed to achieve — the freeing of the workers of the world and the establishment of communism. Join us!

The address of the
**Partito Comunista
Internazionalista
(Battaglia Comu-
nista)**

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**C.P. 1753
Milano 20101
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